

Vandals, Romans and Berbers

New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa

Edited by
A. H. MERRILLS



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While the origins of the present collection certainly lie in the Leeds sessions of 2000, the individual contributions come from a variety of sources. Several papers were first given at the 'Vandals' Colloquium at the Open University, organized by Richard Miles in the summer of 2001. Again, the discussion generated by this gathering, under the expert guidance of Dick Whittaker, reflected the growing fascination for matters North African. Other papers arose more tangentially from the conferences themselves, but all reflect a vibrant new interest in early medieval Africa.

It is one of the privileges of the editor to be able to offer thanks to individuals who have been particularly helpful in the compilation of a volume. In the present case, I must express especial gratitude to a number of people, all of whom have displayed great patience and understanding as the collection which follows emerged. My thanks are due primarily, of course, to the contributors, who suffered my endless badgering for references or corrections, and coped with shifting deadlines, with admirable aplomb. The Department of Prehistory at The British Museum kindly provided the photograph for the front cover of the volume, and I am also grateful to The Darwin Press for allowing reproduction of excerpts from Elizabeth Savage's *A Gateway to Hell, A Gateway to Paradise. The North African Response to the Arab Conquest* (1997), and to Frank Cass and Company Ltd. for allowing reproduction of passages from Robert Montagne's *The Berbers: Their Social and Political Organisation* (1973).

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Abbreviations

Commonly cited primary sources are given using the abbreviations and editions provided in the primary source bibliography at the end of this volume. Other excerpted primary sources are given in full in the first reference within each paper. Unexcerpted primary sources, and well-known classical works, are cited using the standard abbreviations found in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

<i>AE</i> (date)	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i>
<i>Altava</i>	M. Marcillet-Jaubert (ed.), <i>Les inscriptions d'Altava</i> (Aix-en-Provence, 1968)
<i>Ant. af.</i>	<i>Antiquités africaines</i>
<i>BCTH</i>	<i>Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques</i>
Budé	<i>Collection des Universités de France publiée sous le patronage de l'Association Guillaume Budé</i>
<i>BSGAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société de Géographie et d'Archéologie d'Oran</i>
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina</i> (Turnhout, 1954–)
<i>ChLA</i>	Albert Bruckner and Robert Marichal et al. (eds), <i>Chartae Latinae Antiquiores</i> (Olten-Lausanne, 1954–67, Zürich 1975–).
CIL VIII	G. Willmans, T. Mommsen, R. Cagnal and J. Schmidt <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , vol. VIII, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Africae</i> (Berlin, 1881–).
Courtois, <i>Les Vandales</i>	C. Courtois, <i>Les Vandales et l'Afrique</i> , (Paris, 1955).
Courtois, <i>Victor de Vita</i>	C. Courtois, <i>Victor de Vita et son oeuvre</i> , (Algiers, 1954).
Courtois et al., <i>Tablettes Albertini</i>	C. Courtois, Louis Leschi, Charles Perrat, Charles Saumagne (eds), <i>Tablettes Albertini. Actes privés de l'époque vandale</i> , (Paris 1952).
CSEL	<i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum</i> (Vienna, 1866–).
Gsell, <i>AAA</i>	S. Gsell, <i>Atlas Archéologique de l'Algérie</i> (Paris, 1911). References to sites entries in the Atlas are given in the traditional manner as <i>AAA</i> (sheet no.):(site no.)

- Haïdra* N. Duval and F. Prévot (eds), *Inscriptions chrétienne d'Haïdra*, Recherches archéologiques Haïdra, 1 (Rome, 1975)
- IAM II*, M. Euzennat and J. Marion (eds), *Inscriptions antiques du Maroc*, vol. 2, *Inscriptions latines* (Paris, 1982)
- ICK I* L. Ennabli (ed.), *Les Inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de Carthage. I. La basilique dite de Sainte-Monique à Carthage* (Rome, 1975)
- ICK II* L. Ennabli (ed.), *Les Inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de Carthage. II. La basilique de Mcidfa* (Rome, 1982)
- ICK III* L. Ennabli (ed.), *Les Inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de Carthage. III. Carthage intra et extra muros* (Rome, 1991)
- ILCV* E. Diehl (ed.), *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* (Berlin, 1925–1931)
- ILTun* A. Merlin (ed.), *Inscriptions Latines de Tunisie* (Paris, 1944)
- JRS* *Journal of Roman Studies*
- JThS* *Journal of Theological Studies*
- LCL* Loeb Classical Library
- Mactar* F. Prévot (ed.), *Les inscriptions chrétiennes*, Recherches archéologiques franco-tunisiennes Mactar, 5 (Rome, 1984)
- MEFR* *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Ecole Française de Rome* (until 1970).
- MEFRA* *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Ecole Française de Rome, Antiquité* (after 1970)
- MGH* Monumenta Germaniae Historica
- AA Auctores Antiquissimi
- SRL Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IX
- SRM Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum
- MIÖG* *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* (Innsbruck/Vienna).
- NA* *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde zur Beförderung einer Gesamtausgabe der Quellenschriften deutscher Geschichte des Mittelalters* (Hannover, 1876–).
- PCBE 1* A. Mandouze (ed.), *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 1. Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (303–533)* (Paris, 1982).
- PCBE 2* C. Pietri and L. Pietri (eds), *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas-Empire. 2: Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313–604)*, vol. 1, A–K (Paris-Rome, 1999).

PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca</i> 161 vols (Paris, 1857–66)
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina</i> , 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–91)
PLRE	J. R. Martindale, A. H. M. Jones and J. Morris (eds), <i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , 4 vols (Cambridge, 1971–92).
RE	Pauly/Wissowa – Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft, 1894–
WZM	<i>Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität, Geschichts.- Sprachwissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

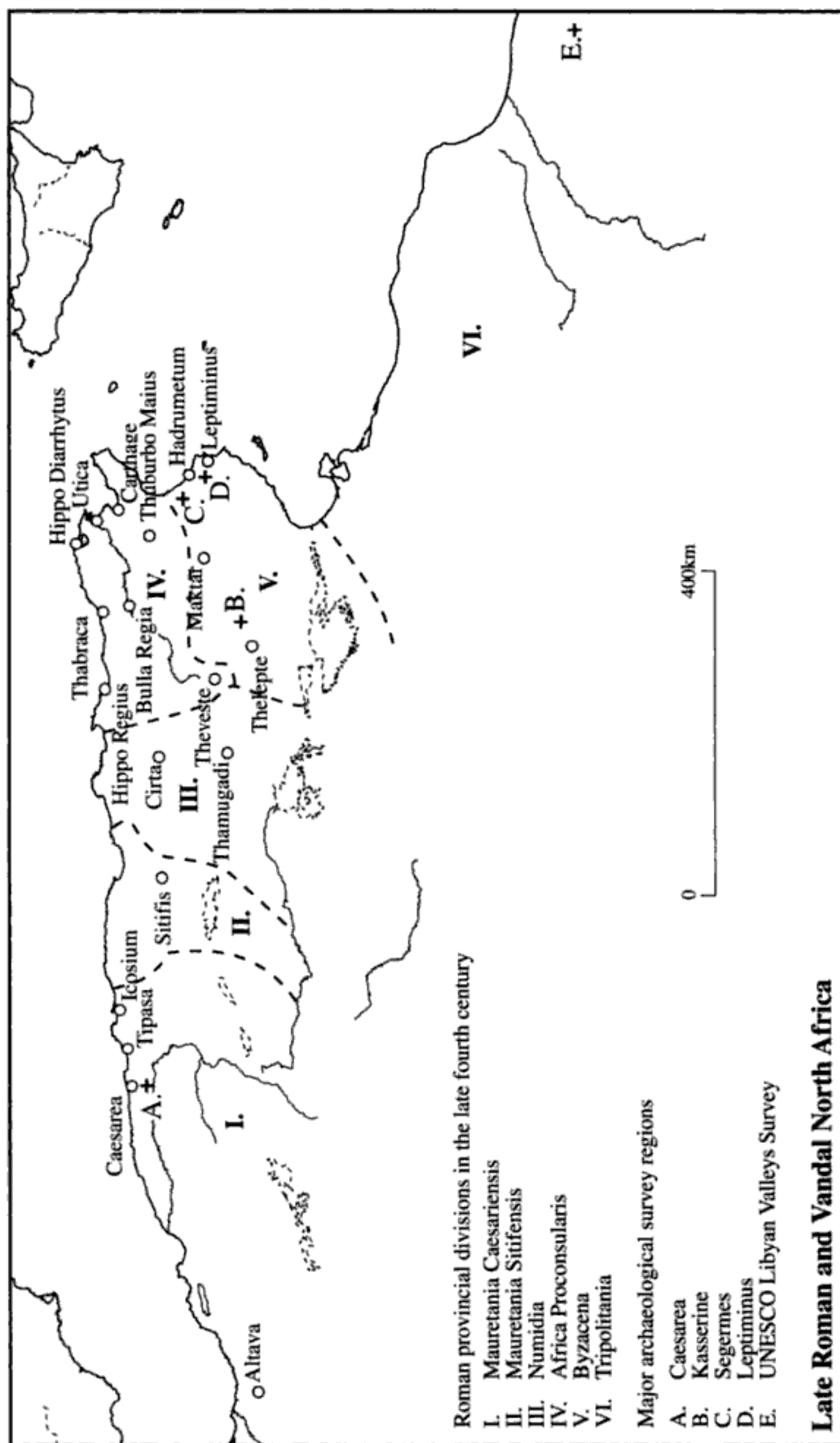


Figure I.1 Late Roman and Vandal North Africa

Introduction

Vandals, Romans and Berbers: Understanding Late Antique North Africa¹

A. H. Merrills

The period of the Vandal occupation can sometimes read like an anomalous chapter in the history of North Africa. Partially insulated from the social and economic problems that beset the remainder of the western empire in the third and fourth centuries, the rich provinces of Roman Africa were unable to escape the massive political changes of the fifth and sixth. In 428, a group of Vandals, counting Goths, Alans and Hispano-Romans among their number, crossed into Mauretania Caesariensis after little under a generation of settlement in southern Spain. In just over a decade, the group had established its foothold in Carthage, and from it set about creating the first Germanic successor state in the West. Simultaneously, the gradual atrophying of direct imperial authority in the mountainous hinterland of Mauretania and Numidia and in the pre-desert of Libya encouraged the strengthening of semi-autonomous Moorish or Berber polities. Yet these embryonic states were never allowed to reach maturity. Whereas the foundations of many modern European nations are traced readily back to the shifting sands of the early medieval period, no such teleology is possible for North Africa. In 534, less than a century after the Vandals had established themselves within Carthage, they were rudely evicted following the Byzantine reconquest of the region. Little more than a century after that, the authority of Constantinople and the emergent Berber kingdoms were themselves overwhelmed by the more lasting effects of the Arab conquest.

If the political landscape of North Africa changed dramatically within the fifth and sixth centuries, however, strong patterns of continuity were also evident. Vandals and Berbers alike seem to have defined their political growth with constant reference to the model provided by the empire. Patterns of land exploitation and regional economic relationships changed at a far slower pace than did the political environment, and the everyday life of rural Africa seems to have been little affected by the change of authority in Carthage. To judge from the epigraphic testimony of the

¹ I am grateful to Jane Hiddleston and particularly Mike Clover for comments and suggestions regarding the structure and detail of this introduction. Richard Miles also offered many valuable suggestions regarding recent and forthcoming archaeological publications. For many of the other points raised within it, and for much of the bibliography, I am indebted to Mark Handley, without whose infectious enthusiasm and encyclopaedic knowledge of matters early medieval, the introduction, and the collection as a whole, could never have been attempted.

period, Roman municipal institutions also survived, and the mercantile ties which bound the African provinces to the Mediterranean world remained tight into the seventh century. In some senses the final flourishing of Latin civilization in North Africa, in others the abortive development of a Germanic Africa, and in still others an important highlight in the long history of the Berber polities of the region, the fifth and sixth centuries are beset by contradiction.

The present collection of essays embraces a broad geography, both physically and culturally. Broadly speaking, the Vandal kingdom itself was centred in Carthage and the province of Africa Proconsularis – in what is now Northern Tunisia – and looked outwards from there into the Western Mediterranean and beyond.² At its peak, under the leadership of Geiseric (428–78), Vandal influence extended beyond Africa into the Balearic Islands, Sardinia, Corsica and parts of Sicily.³ To judge from references to Vandal activity in Gallaecia, in north-western Spain, the maritime influence of the group may even have extended through the Straits of Gades and into the Atlantic. It was from this thalassocracy that the Vandals launched raids throughout the Adriatic and the Italian peninsula and ultimately sacked Rome in 455. Yet after initial consolidation under Geiseric, Vandal control over the islands manifested itself in a variety of forms. Sicily proved to be an important counter in diplomatic negotiations with Ostrogothic Italy and in the wider game of controlling mercantile activity in the inland sea.⁴ Sardinia was both a convenient place for the exile of Catholic bishops, and a perennial irritation for the Vandals through its inhabitants' propensity to rebel.⁵

It was within this maritime context that the Hasding rulers of North Africa defined their position with respect to the empire of Constantinople and the developing successor kingdoms of the West. Under Huneric (478–84), Gunthamund (484–96), Thrasamund (496–523), Hilderic (523–30) and finally Gelimer (530–34), Vandal rule centred upon North Africa, but its relationship with the empire of the North was a multi-faceted one. In practical, political terms, Vandal rule in North Africa would seem to have been delimited by the settlement treaty of 442, which sought to stabilize relations between Vandal and Roman following the capture of Carthage three years earlier. North Africa, it would seem, was nominally divided. Germanic authority within Africa Proconsularis was certainly recognized by this treaty, and it seems likely that Vandal influence

² For a general overview of the Vandal Kingdom, see A. Cameron, 'Vandal and Byzantine Africa', in A. Cameron et al. (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History, XIV. Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, AD 425–600* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 552–69; H. Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, tr. T. Dunlap (Berkeley, 1997), pp. 159–82.

³ On the Vandal occupation of the Mediterranean islands, see Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 184–93, 205–14; F. M. Clover, 'A Game of Bluff: The Fate of Sicily After AD 476', *Historia*, 48.2 (1999), pp. 235–44; P. Ermini Letizia, 'La Sardegna e l'Africa nel periodo vandalico', *L'Africa romana*, 2 (1985), pp. 105–22; P. Pergola, 'La christianisation du monde rural dans la Corse Vandale et Byzantine', *L'Africa romana*, 12 (1998), pp. 811–26.

⁴ Discussed at length by Clover, 'A Game of Bluff'.

⁵ See, for example, Ferrandus, *VF.*, 17–25 (on episcopal exile) and Procopius, *BV.*, I.10.25–34, II.22–4 (on revolt in Sardinia).

extended at times over the coastal regions of Mauretania Caesariensis, Byzacena and parts of Numidia.⁶ Elsewhere, nominal imperial rule continued, although the precise nature of Vandal relations with the empire have been much disputed.⁷ Vandal legitimacy was further secured by Huneric's long-arranged marriage with the Theodosian princess Eudocia, and through the Germanic adoption of Roman, and African, motifs of power.⁸ Simultaneously celebrated as rulers in the Germanic, Roman and Carthaginian mould, and anxious to legitimate their position with respect to their varied neighbours, the Hasding kings of the Vandals responded to a variety of contrasting impulses in the creation of their North African kingdom.

Yet the Vandals were not the only group to lay claim to the legacy of imperial rule. The uplands of the Tunisian Dorsal and the Aures Mountains and the marginal regions of the pre-desert, lay beyond the influence of the Germanic realm. Ancient sources refer to the inhabitants of these regions by a variety of ethnic names, although the term 'Berber', which became widespread in seventh-century Arab texts, is now commonly used as a generic designation.⁹ These groups had experienced a shifting relationship with the rulers of Carthage throughout the imperial period and naturally felt the repercussions of the changes in power during late Antiquity.¹⁰ As might be expected, responses to these changed political

⁶ Y. Modéran, 'L'Afrique et la persécution vandale', in L. Pietri (ed.), *Nouvelle Histoire du Christianisme, des origines à nos jours. III: Les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident* (Paris, 1998), pp. 255–7 and 'L'établissement territorial des Vandales en Afrique', *Antiquité Tardive*, 10 (2002), pp. 107–10 argue persuasively that Vandal authority was largely limited to the Proconsular province. On the settlement treaty itself, compare Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.13; Prosper, *Chron.*, 1320–1321, 1345–7; Procopius, *BV.*, I.4.10, 14, 37. and cf. *Nov. Val.* XII.2 and XIII.12. And note also the evidence provided by the Madrid version of the *Laterculus Regum Wandalorum*, which locates Geiseric's reign in *Affrica* (sic), but that of his legitimate successors only in Carthage. I am indebted to Mike Clover for this observation. For a new edition of this text, and discussion of its implications, see Chapter 8 by Roland Steinacher in the present volume.

⁷ On this issue, see now Modéran, 'L'établissement territorial des Vandales en Afrique' and the discussion by Andreas Schwarcz in Chapter 2 of the present volume.

⁸ I am indebted to Guido Berndt and Jonathan Conant for their observations regarding the significance of dynastic alliance to early Vandal diplomacy. On Vandal adoption of Punic imagery, see esp. F. M. Clover, 'Felix Karthago', in F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys (eds), *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, (Madison, WI, 1989), and also in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 40 (1986), repr. in his *The Late Roman West and the Vandals* (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 5–8.

⁹ For excellent summaries of Berber history more generally, see esp. M. Brett and E. Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford, 1996) and G. Camps *Berbères. Aux marges de l'histoire* (Paris, 1980), and now Y. Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique Romaine (IV–VIe siècle)*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 314 (Rome, 2003). The last of these provides a thorough and thought-provoking study of the Berber politics, particularly in the latter part of this period. Unfortunately, the present publication went to press before many of Modéran's arguments could be fully absorbed.

¹⁰ Procopius, *BV.*, I.xxv.1–9. On the development of these kingdoms see Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 325–52; Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, pp. 50–80 and the brief discussion below.

circumstances varied dramatically in response to local circumstances. In the pre-desert regions of Libya Tripolitania during the fourth and fifth century, the dominant local elites of the cultivated regions increasingly found their loyalties moving away from the Mediterranean Empire, and towards the new Laguatan tribal confederations of the interior.¹¹ This shift represented the aggregation and re-integration of oasis, semi-transhumant and sedentary populations within a political system to which Rome was increasingly irrelevant. Instead, regional religious foci, like the cult site at Ghirza, seem to have enjoyed a restored status. Further west, during the latter part of the fifth century, inscriptions reveal an adoption – and adaptation – of the imperial rhetoric of power by the tribal elites of the Aures Mountains. One inscription in little Kabylia celebrates the self-proclaimed *rex gentis Ucutamani*.¹² On another, the Berber king Masties laid claim to the successive titles of *Dux* and *Imperator*.¹³ The third, and most famous inscription is that from Altava in 508AD which honours the ruler Masuna and declares him king over both Moors and Romans – an assertion of dual power with obvious parallels to the successor kingdoms of Europe, and indeed the Vandal kingdom of Carthage.¹⁴ Relations with the wider world were equally varied. At differing times allied or at war with the Vandals, or bound by non-aggression pacts, the Berber elites seem to have looked to both Carthage and to Constantinople for legitimation of their rule.¹⁵ Indeed, it has been suggested that Masties' own ducal rank may well have been bestowed by a Vandal, rather than imperial authority.¹⁶ Yet the Berber states were effectively autonomous and extended their sway beyond the familiar parameters of the classical world. Like the Vandals, these groups adopted an ambiguous position towards the new powers within the Mediterranean and yet developed within a uniquely African context.

¹¹ See esp. D. J. Mattingly, 'Libyans and the *Limes*: Culture and Society in Roman Tripolitania', *Ant. af.*, 23 (1987), pp. 71–93.

¹² *CIL* VIII. 8379.

¹³ See P. Morizot, 'Pour une nouvelle lecture de l'*elogium* de Masties', *Ant. af.*, 25 (1989), pp. 263–84 and J. Desanges, 'À propos de Masties, *imperator* berbère et chrétien', *Ktema*, 21 (1996), pp. 183–8.

¹⁴ *Altava*, no. 194, *AE* (1998), no. 1598. On this inscription, see esp. G. Camps, '*Rex gentium, Maurorum et Romanorum*. Recherches sur les royaumes de Maurétania des VI^e et VII^e siècles', *Ant. af.*, 20 (1984), pp. 183–218; and 'Nouvelles observations sur l'inscription du roi Masuna à Altava', *BCTH*, n.s. 18B (1988), pp. 153–7. Compare Jordanes, *Getica*, LVII. 295, which terms Theoderic *Gothorum Romanorumque regnator*, and the discussion of this passage by E. A. Thompson, 'A.D. 476 and after', in his *Romans and Barbarians. the Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison, WI, 1982), pp. 61–76 and esp. n. 24.

¹⁵ John of Biclarum, *Chronicon*, T. Mommsen (ed.), MGH, AA, XI (Hannover, 1894), 569 and 573 describes delegations from African groups to Constantinople. See also the well-known account of Berber attitudes to Vandal and Byzantine authority in Procopius, *BV.*, I.25.1–9. These patterns of legitimation are discussed by Andy Blackhurst and Alan Rushworth in Chapters 3 and 4 of the present volume.

¹⁶ See esp. the illuminating comments of F. M. Clover in his review of *PLRE*, 2 in *Classical Philology*, 78 (1983), esp. pp. 165–6.

Consequently, one of the greatest challenges in appreciating the development of Africa in the fifth and sixth centuries is that of locating Vandal and Berber history within a series of conflicting historical narratives, both within the wider world and within their unique geographical settings. On one level, Vandal rule in Africa must be understood alongside the evolution of similar kingdoms in Italy, Spain and Gaul. Like these regions, fifth- and sixth-century Africa witnessed the confrontation and conglomeration of a Germanic minority and an indigenous population with its own varied loyalties. It would be difficult to comprehend the religious policies of the Vandal kingdom without reference to contemporary events in Italy or Spain, for example, and understanding Germanic settlement would similarly be futile without adequate appreciation of patterns of accommodation evident elsewhere. In other ways, however, the Vandal kingdom that developed within Africa Proconsularis must be regarded alongside the other successor states to emerge in the Maghreb during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries, and which traced their own social heritage back to the period of Roman domination and beyond. Like the Vandal kingdom, these polities laid claim to the legacy of the empire, and combined the autochthonous traditions of the regions in which they developed with the new political opportunities opening within the post-Roman world. It is only by charting these different currents – of European, imperial and African history – that a satisfactory understanding of fifth- and sixth-century North Africa can be reached.

MODERN STUDIES OF FIFTH AND SIXTH-CENTURY AFRICA

It is telling that the most influential modern study of the Vandal State – Christian Courtois' magisterial *Les Vandales et l'Afrique*, published in 1955 – was concerned only partially with the history of the region under Germanic control.¹⁷ Like many of the early twentieth-century studies of the region, Courtois was influenced by his geographical knowledge quite as much as his historical understanding. Influenced in turn by the sweeping panorama of Julien's *Histoire de L'Afrique du Nord* – the revised edition of which Courtois edited – by the massive, yet unfinished historical survey of Stephane Gsell, the regional studies of J. Carcopino, and E-F. Gautier's analyses of Berber language and society, Courtois rooted his historical analysis firmly in the familiar landscape of French North Africa.¹⁸ Yet, like Gautier, Courtois also betrayed an interest in the Germanic past – 'l'épopée Vandale' in the

¹⁷ Courtois, *Les Vandales*. Courtois' other great contributions to the study of Vandal Africa were his nuanced assessment of Victor of Vita's *Historia Persecutionis*: Courtois, *Victor de Vita*, and his role in the publication of the Albertini Tablets: Courtois et al., *Tablettes Albertini*. For fuller discussion of these sources, see below.

¹⁸ C.-A. Julien, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord. Tunisie-Algérie-Maroc* (Paris, 1931, repr. 1951); E. F. Gautier, *Les siècles obscurs du Maghreb: L'islamisation de l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1927); Genséric roi des Vandales (Paris, 1935); J. Carcopino, *Maroc Antique* (Paris, 1948).

words of the earlier historian. Critically utilizing Gauthier and Ludwig Schmidt's account of Vandalic prehistory, the latter having recently been published in French translation, Courtois essentially married the interests of Germanic ethnography with *Annaliste* regional history.¹⁹ As the duality of his work's title suggests, and as the countless other oppositions in his text reveal still more clearly, Courtois did not create from this a single dominant historical narrative. Indeed, much of the most astute modern criticism of the work turns upon its over-statement of certain dichotomies – particularly that of the sedentary 'Roman' Africa and nomadic 'forgotten' Africa.²⁰ Nevertheless, if certain aspects of Courtois' interpretative framework have now been rejected, the very formulation of his work provides eloquent testimony to the complexities of North Africa in the fifth and sixth centuries, and to the different impulses which shape its study.

Archaeological scholarship

Although Courtois remains an essential starting point for any study of late antique Africa, modern understanding of the region has developed substantially in the last half-century. The expansion of the material record over the last 50 years and the increasing sophistication with which it is interpreted have been at the forefront of these developments.²¹ No longer regarded simply as levels to be bashed through on the way to the excavation of classical Roman or Punic features, later occupation layers are increasingly investigated in their own right, with important implications for the understanding of the period. This increased appreciation has been greatly facilitated by the evolution of accurate typologies, most obviously of African Red Slip ware (ARS) – a recognizable ceramic fineware found throughout the Mediterranean up to the eighth century – and of mosaic decorative schemes within

¹⁹ L. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen* (Leipzig, 1901, repr. Munich 1942). Despite its ostensible focus, Courtois' *Les Vandales*, actually devotes pp. 11–64 to Vandalic prehistory, and pp. 65–152 to the physical and human geography of Roman Africa.

²⁰ See esp. C. R. Whittaker, 'Land and labour in North Africa', *Klio. Beiträge zur alten Geschichte. Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR Zentralinstitut für alte Geschichte und Archäologie* 2/60 (1978), pp. 335–7, repr. in his *Land, City and Trade in the Roman Empire* (Aldershot, 1993). For a more sympathetic view of Courtois' oppositions between Roman plain and Berber highland, compare B. D. Shaw, 'Archaeology and Knowledge: The history of the African provinces of the Roman Empire', *Florilegium. Carleton University Papers on Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 2 (Ottawa, 1980), pp. 42–3, repr. in his *Environment and Society in Roman North Africa. Studies in History and Archaeology* (Aldershot, 1995).

²¹ For a stimulating overview of recent developments in the archaeology of Roman Africa, see D. J. Mattingly and R. B. Hitchner, 'Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review', *JRS*, 85 (1995), pp. 165–213. For recent excavations on late antique sites in the region, see also N. Duval, 'Quinze ans de recherches archéologiques sur l'antiquité tardive en Afrique du Nord. 1975–1990', *Revue des études anciennes*, 92 (1990), pp. 349–87 and 'Vingt ans de recherches archéologiques sur l'antiquité tardive en Afrique du Nord. 1975–1993', *Revue des études anciennes*, 95 (1993), pp. 583–640. On the methodological challenges within North African archaeology see also Shaw, 'Archaeology and Knowledge'.

North African contexts.²² In both cases, features which were previously interpreted as dating from the imperial period have been recognized as reflective of fourth-, fifth- and sixth-century occupation.

The extensive UNESCO excavations at Carthage have provided a figurehead for late antique archaeology in Africa, with the happy result that the student of the Vandal period is beset with a relative embarrassment of published material on the occupation of the city, and of the changing patterns of urban life in Africa more generally.²³ At Carthage, as at other sites like Cherchel (Iol Caesarea) and Bulla Regia in northern Numidia, shifting patterns of urban life have been the subject of considerable scholarly attention.²⁴ Traditionally viewed as a period that saw the end

²² J. W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery* (London, 1972) and *Supplement to Late Roman Pottery* (London, 1980) were central to the identification of ARS typologies. See now, M. Mackensen, 'Centres of African Red Slip Ware in Tunisia from the late 5th to the 7th Century AD', and S. Tortorella, 'La sigillata Africana in Italia nel VIe nel VII secolo d.C: problemi di cronologia e di distribuzione', in L. Sagui (ed.), *La ceramica in Italia: VI-VII Secolo. Atti del convegno in onore di John Hayes Rome 1995* (Florence, 1998), pp. 23-39 and pp. 43-69. On mosaics, see M. A. Alexander and M. Ennaifer, *Corpus des mosaïques de Tunisie* (Tunis, 1973-) and the comprehensive analysis provided by K. M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford, 1978).

²³ For a detailed assessment of knowledge of Vandal and Byzantine Carthage at the time of writing, see J. H. Humphrey, 'Vandal and Byzantine Carthage: Some New Archaeological Evidence', in J. Pedley (ed.), *New Light on Ancient Carthage* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1980), pp. 85-120: still a useful starting point, but which has now been surpassed by the excellent work of L. Ennabli, *Carthage: une métropole Chrétienne* (Paris, 1997). For a recent summary of the Carthage excavations, see Mattingly and Hitchner, 'Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review', pp. 180-183, and the bibliography of excavation reports at p. 180, n. 158. Descriptions of continuing work may be found in the *CEDAC Carthage Bulletin*. This research has prompted several new historical studies of Vandal Carthage. See esp. S. Lancel, 'Victor de Vita et la Carthage vandale', *L'Africa romana*, 6 (1989), pp. 649-61; F. M. Clover 'Carthage and the Vandals', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Excavations at Carthage VII* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1982), pp. 1-22, repr. in his *The Late Roman West and the Vandals* (Aldershot, 1993); A. Ben Abed-Ben Khader and N. Duval, 'Carthage, la capitale du royaume et les villes de Tunisie à l'époque vandale', in G. Ripoll and J. M. Gurt (eds), *Sedes Regiae (ann. 400-800)* (Barcelona, 2000), pp. 163-218.

²⁴ On Cherchel, see esp. the remarkable survey report of P. Leveau, *Caesarea de Maurétanie. Une ville romaine et ses campagnes*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome, 70 (Rome, 1984); the excavation reports of N. Benseddik and T. W. Potter, *Fouilles du forum de Cherchel. Rapport préliminaire. 4e Supplément au Bulletin d'Archéologie Algérienne* (Algiers, 1986); *Fouilles du forum de Cherchel. Rapport finale. 6e Supplément au Bulletin d'Archéologie Algérienne* (Algiers, 1994) and the immensely accessible summary of the implications of this work in T. W. Potter, *Towns in Late Antiquity: Iol Caesarea and its Context* (Sheffield, 1995). On Bulla Regia, see A. Beschtaouch, R. Hanoune, M. Khanoussi, A. Olivier and Y. Thébert, *Recherches archéologiques Franco-Tunisiennes à Bulla Regia*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome, 28 (Rome, 1983). Important discussions of urban transition in North Africa as a whole are provided in A. Mahjoubi, 'De la fin de l'antiquité au haut moyen âge: héritages et changements dans l'urbanisme Africain', *Histoire et archéologie de l'Afrique du Nord. Actes du IIIe colloque International* (Paris, 1986), pp. 391-406; P. Pergola, 'Continuità e trasformazioni urbane nell'Africa Romana', in N. Cambri et al. (eds), *Acta XIII Congressus Internationalis Archaeologiae Christianae* (Rome, 1998), pp. 55-60; S. Roskams, 'Urban Transition in North Africa: Roman and Medieval Towns of

of meaningful civic life within the region, recent research on the fifth and sixth centuries has demanded the reappraisal of many long-held assumptions. At Carthage, the impact and aftershocks of the Vandal conquest have been detected in the destruction of the Odeon, circular monument and theatre. The incursion of Vandal-period burials into prestige buildings in the same city, and the widespread disappearance of the forum as a focus for civic life in others cities of the region, have further strengthened the assumption that the events of the 430s that so marked the psyche of Victor of Vita, Quodvultdeus and Fulgentius of Ruspe left similar scarring on the urban archaeological record.²⁵ Yet recent excavation on the renovation and construction of the public buildings of Vandal Carthage – and the apparent survival of its classical street-grid into the sixth century – suggest that the civic life of Carthage may have been more resilient than has often been thought.²⁶

Where change in urban topography may be detected with confidence, moreover, the assumption that the fifth century was necessarily a period of decline is a difficult one to sustain. The proliferation of dense suburban settlement in many cities led to the emergence of new religious or political foci, and evergetism – from both Vandal and Roman patrons – seems to have continued. Excavation in Carthage has uncovered both an important Vandal political focus at Byrsa Hill and a substantial ecclesiastical complex, which reached its fullest development in the Byzantine period, but which certainly had its origins in the fifth century.²⁷ No less importantly, recent excavation has also revealed the development of new industrial practices and centres within the towns. The proliferation of olive presses and lime kilns on sites previously occupied by prestige public buildings confirms that the change in urban topography was brought about more by new economic impulses than by simple patterns of civic ‘decline’.²⁸

the Maghreb’, in S. T. Loseby and N. Christie (eds), *Towns in Transition. Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 159–83 and now T. W. Potter, ‘Le città romane dell’Africa Settentrionale nel periodo vandalico’, in P. Delogu (ed.), *Le invasioni barbariche nel meridione dell’impero: Visigoti, Vandali, Ostrogoti* (Cosenza, 2001), pp. 119–50.

²⁵ Humphrey, ‘Vandal and Byzantine Carthage’, pp. 109–31; Mattingly and Hitchner, ‘Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review’, p. 210; Potter, *Towns in Late Antiquity*, pp. 64–79.

²⁶ See, for example, the excavation of the spectacular Vandal period basilica discussed in Richard Miles (ed.), *Excavations at Bir Messaouda, Carthage: The Late Antique and Byzantine Structures* (Ghent, forthcoming).

²⁷ On the prestige site at Byrsa hill, which may or may not be associated with the complex described by Procopius at *BV.*, II. 6.9, see P. Gros, ‘Colline de Byrsa: les vestiges romains’, in A. Ennabli (ed.), *Pour sauver Carthage. Exploration et conservation de la cité punique, romain et byzantine* (Paris, 1992), pp. 99–104; J. Deneauve, ‘Le centre monumental de Carthage’, *Carthage et son territoire. Histoire et archéologie de l’Afrique du Nord. IVe Colloque* (Paris, 1990), pp. 143–55; and Mattingly and Hitchner, ‘Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review’, p. 210, n. 462. On the ecclesiastical complex, see the discussion in Humphrey ‘Vandal and Byzantine Carthage’, pp. 91–4.

²⁸ Shifts in urban production patterns are discussed by A. Leone, ‘Change or No Change? Revised Perceptions on Urban Transformation in Late Antiquity’, in P. Baker et al. (eds),

The renovation of the merchant harbour of Carthage during the Vandal period is a reminder of the continued importance of Africa to the long-distance trade networks of the Mediterranean basin.²⁹ North Africa, of course, had long enjoyed close economic ties with the northern coast of the Mediterranean through the *annona* – the state-driven purchase and distribution-system of grain and oil which was largely responsible for keeping Rome fed.³⁰ Although the arrival of the Vandals naturally disrupted the smooth operation of this system, the suggestion that African exports were dramatically affected by the political events of the mid-fifth century is contradicted by the sheer volume of recognizably African amphorae and ARS found throughout the Mediterranean during this period.³¹ There does appear to have been a slight decline in African exports during the fifth century, but it is far less marked than for other regions and the relative prosperity of African trade seems clear. Indeed, the broader patterns of the region's economy generally elude any attempt to reconcile them with the political upheavals of the period.

The direct impact of the Vandal occupation upon the African material record is thus not to be found in the destruction layers of urban sites, but in the coins and portable objects that may be associated with the group. In both cases, however, the implications of these finds have been challenged. After 477, the Vandal kings started to produce their own low-denomination coins in bronze and silver; a shift demonstrated by the coins themselves, and by the absence of low-denomination imperial currency from African sites of the period.³² As several recent studies have

TRAC 98. Proceedings of the 8th Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (Oxford, 1999), pp. 121–30; and 'Topographies of Production in North African Cities during the Vandal and Byzantine Periods', in L. Lavan and W. Bowden (eds), *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 257–87; see also the important comments in S. Ellis, 'Carthage in the Seventh Century: An Expanding Population?', *Cahiers des études anciennes*, 17 (1985), pp. 30–42.

²⁹ Z. Ben Abdallah and H. Ben Hassen, 'Rapport préliminaire sur la fouille du port marchand de Carthage', *CEDAC*, 12 (1991), p. 6. The issue of continuity in long-distance Mediterranean trade during the early medieval period is a much disputed one. See esp. the seminal study of R. Hodges and D. Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe* (Oxford, 1983), the recent analysis of M. McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 25–119 and the sober assessment provided by B. Ward-Perkins, 'Specialized production and exchange', in A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins and M. Whitby (eds), *Cambridge Ancient History XIV. Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors A.D. 425–600* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 346–71.

³⁰ On which see B. Sirks, *Food for Rome* (Amsterdam, 1991), pp. 146–92.

³¹ On the amphorae, see S. Keay, 'African Amphorae', in L. Sagui (ed.), *La ceramica in Italia: VI–VII Secolo. Atti del convegno in onore di John Hayes Rome 1995* (Florence, 1998), pp. 141–55.

³² On coinage circulation, see Humphrey, 'Vandal and Byzantine Carthage', pp. 90–1; Mattingly and Hitchner, 'Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review', pp. 203–4 and the assembled bibliography and esp. C. Morrisson, 'Caratteristiche ed uso della moneta proto-vandalica e vandalica', in P. Delogu (ed.), *Le invasioni barbariche nel meridione dell'impero: Visigoti, Vandali, Ostrogoti* (Cosenza, 2001), pp. 151–80.

shown, such coins offered an invaluable medium for the celebration of Vandal kingship, yet the absence of a similar gold coinage, and the implications of this reluctance to usurp the imperial prerogative, has been the matter of some debate.³³

The most concerted attempt to establish a typology of Vandal material culture was undertaken by Gerd Koenig, and incorporated a detailed summary, not only of the objects themselves, but of epitaphs and mosaics commemorating recognizably Germanic individuals.³⁴ It is certainly worth noting the concentration of Koenig's Vandal find-spots in Africa Proconsularis, which may reflect the relative density of Germanic settlement in the region, but it should also be added that only eight graves within North Africa could be confidently identified as 'Germanic' – an astonishingly small number. Increasingly, the identification of specific material cultures as the basis for the identification of historic ethnicities has also been challenged on a fundamental level.³⁵ More recent analyses of African grave-goods do concur with the geographical distribution proposed by Koenig, but also stress that differences in dress or ornamentation are as likely to reflect social as ethnic status, and rapidly disappeared within two generations of the Germanic occupation.³⁶

The prominence of Roman civic sites within North Africa, and the implications of these excavations for the tourist industry of the region, have ensured that particular attention has been devoted to prestige projects. Of comparable scholarly importance, however, has been the recent attention granted to less prominent sites, and the last three decades have witnessed an important expansion in the surveying of rural areas. Projects like the curtailed UNESCO Libyan Valleys Survey, the Kasserine Survey and the Segermes Survey all provide nuanced images of evolving landscapes from prehistory to the Arab conquest and beyond.³⁷ In common with the

³³ On the ideological implications of the Vandal coinage, see esp. Clover, 'Felix Karthago', pp. 7–8.

³⁴ G. G. Koenig, 'Wandalische Grabfunde des 5. und 6. Jahrhunderts', *Madriider Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, 22 (1981), pp. 299–360.

³⁵ See esp. the important work of S. Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity. Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London, 1997).

³⁶ See esp. P. von Rummel, 'Habitas Vandalarum? Zur frage nach einer gruppenspezifischen klerdung der Vandalen in Nordafrika', *Antiquité Tardive*, 10 (2002), pp. 131–41; J. Kleeman, 'Quelques réflexions sur l'interprétation ethnique des sépultures habillées considérées comme Vandales', *Antiquité Tardive*, 10 (2002), pp. 123–9 and S. T. Stevens, 'A Late-Roman Urban Population in a Cemetery of Vandalic Date at Carthage', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 8 (1995), pp. 263–70.

³⁷ UNESCO Survey: D. J. Mattingly, *Tripolitania* (London, 1995); Kasserine Survey: D. J. Mattingly, 'Olive cultivation and the Albertini Tablets', *L'Africa romana*, 6 (1989), pp. 403–15; R. B. Hitchner, 'Historical Texts and Archaeological Context in Roman North Africa: The Albertini Tablets and the Kasserine Survey', in D. B. Small (ed.), *Methods in the Mediterranean: Historical and Archaeological Views on Texts and Archaeology*, Mnemosyne suppl., 135 (Leiden, 1995), pp. 124–42; 'The Kasserine Archaeological Survey 1987', *Ant. af.*, 26 (1990), pp. 231–60; 'The Kasserine Archaeological Survey 1982–1986', *Ant. af.*, 24 (1988), pp. 7–41; 'The organization of rural settlement in the Cillium-Thelepte region (Kasserine, Central Tunisia)', *L'Africa romana*, 6 (1988), pp. 387–402; Segermes

evidence for long distance trade, the Kasserine Survey in Byzacena and the survey of the territory of Segermes in Africa Proconsularis suggest that the Vandal period is best read as one of continuity with gradual change, rather than of cataclysmic decline. Indeed, the fourth- and fifth-century evidence from the Kasserine Valley is among the richest from the survey, and suggests a continuity of intensive land exploitation in a region that was later to be given over to pastoralism. Patterns of land organization, economic exploitation and diet certainly changed in the period down to the Arab conquest, and at different rates in different regions, but these shifts were made in response to a variety of different economic and demographic factors, and seem to have been unaffected by short-term political stimuli.

Crucially, these conclusions would appear to support the image of continuity in rural life provided by other sources from the period. Most famous of these are the so-called Albertini Tablets; a collection of wooden estate records which survive from near the region of the Kasserine Survey and date from the late fifth century.³⁸ Were it not for the existence of the comparable tablets and ostraka from Bir Trouch and elsewhere, the Albertini Tablets would provide a unique economic and legal source. As it is, they may be considered within a wider group of similar pieces, many of which remain unpublished and consequently under-studied. Late antique, Vandal and Byzantine period ostraka have been discovered – and are still being discovered – throughout the region, and are starting to receive much-deserved attention.³⁹

Archaeological investigation of the Moorish successor states, however, has some way to go to catch up with that relating to their Vandal neighbours. For much of the twentieth century, archaeology in the frontier zone of Roman Africa was distorted by the colonial interests of its practitioners, and demonstrated a particularly marked concern with Roman and military sites, while expressing little direct interest in the material record of Berber societies.⁴⁰ Naturally enough, these presuppositions

Survey: S. Dietz, et al. (eds), *Africa Proconsularis. Regional Studies in the Segermes Valley of Northern Tunisia*. 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1995) and see also D. J. Mattingly, 'The Field Survey: Strategy, Methodology and Preliminary results', in N. Ben Lazreg and D. J. Mattingly (eds), *Leptiminus (Lamta): A Roman Port City in Tunisia. Report no 1*. JRA Supplementary Series, 4 (Ann Arbor, MI, 1992), pp. 89–114.

³⁸ Courtois et al., *Tablettes Albertini*. For bibliographic discussion, see Conant in Chapter 10 of the present volume.

³⁹ E. Albertini, 'Ostrakon byzantin de Négrine', *Cinquantenaire de la Faculté des Lettres d'Alger* (Algiers, 1932), pp. 53–62; P.-A. Février, 'Ostraka de la région de Bir Trouch', *Bulletin d'archéologie algérienne*, 2 (1966–67), pp. 239–49; P.-A. Février and Yvette Duval, 'Procès-verbal de déposition de reliques de la région de Telergma (VIIe s.)', *MEFR*, 81 (1969), pp. 257–320. See also J. T. Peña, 'The Mobilization of State Olive Oil in Roman North Africa: The Evidence of Late 4th-c Ostraca from Carthage', in J. T. Peña et al. (eds), *Carthage Papers* (Portsmouth, RI, 1998), pp. 117–238 and the study by Jacqueline Godfrey in Chapter 9 of the present volume on the Ilôt de l'amirauté ostraca.

⁴⁰ The history and significance of this colonialist agenda is brilliantly dissected by D. J. Mattingly, 'From One Colonialism to Another: Imperialism and the Maghreb', in J. Webster and N. J. Cooper (eds), *Roman Imperialism: Post-Colonial Perspectives*, Leicester Archaeology Monographs, 3 (Leicester, 1996), pp. 49–69, and see also Shaw, 'Archaeology and Knowledge'.

survived into the study of the post-Roman world, and the image of an unchanging, ahistoric Berber society proved to be a difficult one to dispel.⁴¹ Courtois devoted considerable attention to the Berber successor kingdoms, and yet his image of small and ephemeral tribal groups, owes much to his presumption of a sharp contrast between 'l'Afrique romaine' and 'l'Afrique oubliée'.⁴² Frustratingly, the opportunity to challenge these assumptions through systematic archaeological analysis of the Moorish kingdoms has yet to be taken, and only a handful of prestige sites like the famous 'djeDar' funeral monuments found near Tiaret in western Algeria, have been satisfactorily excavated.⁴³ As a result, the study of the Berber polities has been reliant upon these few sites, occasional numismatic and epigraphic evidence and the fragmentary historical record.

Despite these obstacles, an image of post-Roman hinterland suffused with a complex network of contrasting and complementary ideologies is indeed beginning to emerge, thanks to a fruitful combination of ideological impulse, anthropological work, a developed appreciation of sub-Roman culture in classical Africa and the sensitive re-interpretation of the evidence available. Where once sedentary farming and the intensive exploitation of the land were regarded as Roman innovations, to be viewed in opposition to indigenous nomadic traditions, such polarities can no longer be sustained. Increasingly, the regional economy is shown to have relied upon a combination of transhumant and semi-nomadic pastoralism, in effective symbiosis with patterns of arable farming that long pre-date the imposition of Roman rule.⁴⁴ As might be expected, this re-interpretation of the economy of the region has been accompanied by a greater appreciation of its social and cultural identities. Relations between sedentary and transhumant groups, and the position adopted by the empire towards each, have been dramatically re-interpreted over the last four decades.⁴⁵ Increasingly, scholars have suggested that Rome happily exploited pre-existing social and agricultural systems, and skilfully adapted the political landscape to her own ends, through diplomacy and occasional military activity. No less important, however, has been the recognition that the Berber groups themselves had a compelling voice within this negotiation of power.

⁴¹ For discussion, see esp. Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, pp. 3–7 and E. Fentress, 'Forever Berber', *Opus*, 2 (1983), pp. 161–75.

⁴² Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 325–52.

⁴³ F. Kadra, *Les Djedars, monuments funéraires berbères de la région de Frenda (Wilaya de Tiaret, Algérie)* (Algiers, 1983) and the discussion by Alan Rushworth in this volume.

⁴⁴ See esp. Whittaker, 'Land and labour in North Africa'; R. I. Lawless, 'The Concept of Tell and Sahara in the Maghreb: A Reappraisal', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 57 (1972), pp. 125–37 and the studies collected in B. D. Shaw, *Rulers, Nomads and Christians in Roman North Africa* (Aldershot, 1995) and *Environment and Society in Roman North Africa. Studies in History and Archaeology* (Aldershot, 1995).

⁴⁵ On the social and political aspects of the African frontier, see esp. C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A social and economic study* (London, 1994); David Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, 1998); D. J. Mattingly, 'The Laguatan: A Libyan Tribal Confederation in the Later Roman Empire', *Libyan Studies*, 14 (1983), pp. 96–108 and his 'Libyans and the Limes'.

Moorish élites happily benefited from the opportunities offered by association with the empire, but were by no means slaves to it. Through the work of Gabriel Camps and Jehan Desanges in particular, sub-Roman Berber groups are increasingly seen as vibrant cultural and social entities which played a fully active role in the shaping of classical and post-classical North Africa.⁴⁶

The most striking manifestation of this shift in emphasis, however, came with the publication of Abdullah Laroui's *L'histoire du Maghreb* in 1970 and Marcel Bénabou's *La résistance africaine à la romanisation*, six years later.⁴⁷ Laroui and Bénabou both sought to redefine the history of the Maghreb from a Berber perspective, and to question the social and cultural impact of the Roman occupation; a conscious challenge to Euro-centrism which has earned comparison with Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*.⁴⁸ As several commentators have noted, the resulting image of local culture, distilled through the filters of indigenous tradition, has obvious parallels with studies of sub-Roman society from elsewhere in the Roman world, although the argument is no less persuasive for these parallels.⁴⁹ Similarly, although the model of cultural conflict that underlies Bénabou's work – either of Roman cultural imposition, or of African resistance to it – has been criticized, its value remains as a correlative to the assumptions of early twentieth-century scholarship on the region.⁵⁰

A rather more pressing problem is the extent to which this post-colonial position challenges the universality of Roman culture only to replace it with a similarly hegemonic model.⁵¹ The emphasis upon underlying unities within the Berber world may be justified through reference to social or linguistic similarities, but certainly

⁴⁶ The productivity of each has been striking. Other than the works mentioned below, see also G. Camps, *Aux origines de la Berbérie. Monuments et rites funéraires protohistoriques* (Paris, 1961); *Les Civilisations préhistoriques de l'Afrique du Nord et du Sahara* (Paris, 1974); 'De Masuna à Koceila. Les destinées de la Maurétanie aux VI^e et VII^e siècles', *BCTH*, n.s. 19b (1985), pp. 307–25 and *Les Berbères. Mémoire et identité* (Paris, 1987). Compare Jehan Desanges, *Catalogue des tribus africaines de l'antiquité classique à l'ouest du Nil* (Dakar, 1962); 'L'Afrique romaine et libyco-berbère', in C. Nicolet (ed.), *Rome et la conquête du monde méditerranéen*, Nouvelle Clio, 8 (Paris, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 627–56 and the *Encyclopédie Berbère*, which is in the process of assembly under Desanges.

⁴⁷ A. Laroui, *L'histoire du Maghreb, un essai de synthèse* (Paris, 1970); M. Bénabou, *La résistance africaine à la romanisation* (Paris, 1976) and see also the reformulation of Bénabou's position in 'L'Afrique et la culture romaine: le problème des survivances', *Cahiers de Tunisie*, 29 (1981), pp. 9–21 and 'L'imperialisme et l'Afrique du Nord, le modèle romain', in D. Nordman and J. -P. Raison (eds), *Sciences de l'homme et conquête coloniale constitution et usage des sciences humaines en Afrique XIX^e–XX^e siècles* (Paris, 1980), pp. 15–22.

⁴⁸ Mattingly, 'From one colonialism to another', p. 59.

⁴⁹ For criticism of Bénabou in particular, see Mattingly, 'From one colonialism to another', p. 58, who is more sympathetic to Bénabou than to his critics and also the astute comments of Whittaker, 'Land and labour in North Africa', pp. 331–2 and his review of 'M. Bénabou, *La résistance africaine à la romanisation*', *JRS*, 68 (1978), pp. 190–92.

⁵⁰ Mattingly, 'Libyans and the *Limes*', p. 80.

⁵¹ A point made by Mattingly and Hitchner, 'Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review', p. 170.

risks an over-simplification of the political position of the groups themselves, particularly in the post-Roman world. To regard the polities of Masuna and Masties, and the very different Laguatan confederations of Libya, as simple manifestations of a dominant 'Berber' ideal differs only in emphasis from the image of the transient Moorish states of 'forgotten Africa' provided by Courtois and his predecessors.

To a great extent, modern studies of the fifth- and sixth-century kingdoms have overcome these difficulties through a nuanced appreciation of the fluidity at the heart of Berber society within the period, and have shifted debate away from traditional binary oppositions towards more subtle fields of analysis. Gabriel Camps, in particular, has identified strong patterns of political and cultural continuity within the Moorish successor states, and yet stresses equally their political evolution in response to the peculiar circumstances of the time. Camps notes the stable dynastic rule at the heart of these polities, yet also notes the importance of Christianity and elements of external legitimation to their stability.⁵² The famous inscription of Altava, for example, adapts the political language of the Mediterranean world to the peculiar circumstances of its immediate environment; a legitimation of the claim to rule over both Moors and Romans, only if this language has an ideological resonance for each group. To different degrees, the same cultural negotiation may be detected in the Christian inscriptions in the Tiaret djedars, and in the location of such monuments in regions that were liminal, both politically and culturally.⁵³ As a result, residual images of the Moorish kingdoms as simple tribal or proto-historic societies no longer seem tenable. In their place recognizable early medieval societies have emerged, which evolved from a complex economic and social environment.

Broadly speaking, therefore, the archaeological study of North Africa in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries has developed immeasurably. Much, of course, remains to be done, and the resumption of surveying and excavation in Algeria and Libya in particular would greatly aid modern understanding of the region as a whole. Nevertheless, the introduction of new surveying methodologies, the increasing attention granted to late Antiquity as a period worthy of study in its own right and the readiness with which post-colonial discourses are being embraced or anticipated have ensured that a richer image of North Africa in the Vandal period is now visible.

Historical scholarship

In the light of this progress, it is surprising to note that the appreciation of textual sources from the Vandal period has developed less spectacularly in the half-century

⁵² See esp. Camps, 'Rex gentium, Maurorum et Romanorum', and compare Morizot, 'Pour une nouvelle lecture de *l'elogium* de Masties'; J. Desanges, 'Un témoignage peu connu de Procope sur la Numidie vandale et byzantine', *Byzantion*, 33 (1963), pp. 41–69 and the important implications of P. Grierson, 'Matasuntha or Mastinas: A Reattribution', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 19 (1959), pp. 119–30.

⁵³ See esp. the paper by Alan Rushworth in Chapter 4 of the present volume.

since the publication of Courtois' great work. Conspicuously, no attempt has been made to challenge the status of *Les Vandales* as the premier synthesis of the region's history within this period. Of recent monographs, only Hans-Joachim Diesner's *Das Vandalenreich*, published in 1968, attempts anything like an overall survey of the Vandal realm, and this work is heavily dependent upon Courtois.⁵⁴ In due course, Frank M. Clover's long-awaited study of Geiseric should provide a more developed image of the earlier phase of the kingdom's development, and should also help to place Vandal Africa within its wider Mediterranean setting; a theme reflected in the writer's published articles.⁵⁵ A number of important shorter pieces have appeared in the French journal of classical Africa, *Antiquités africaines*, and in the proceedings of the Sardinian conferences on Roman Africa published as *Africa Romana*. With the exception of the latest and forthcoming issues of *Antiquité Tardive*, devoted to Vandal and Byzantine Africa, however, little concentrated attention has been granted to the region within the fifth and sixth centuries, and an up-to-date and widespread historical analysis of Vandal Africa remains to be written.

Of particular interest is the extent to which the study of the Vandal kingdom has been isolated from the theoretical convulsions undergone by work on Roman Africa over the last three decades. As has been noted, the adoption of post-colonial attitudes towards the imperial occupation has forced a reformulation of the study of the Berber kingdoms, but the Vandal State of the fifth and sixth centuries has rarely been included within this discussion. Whether the Germanic kingdom is regarded as a further catalyst for the destruction of classical Africa, or as another in a long line of foreign occupying powers, the relative brevity of Vandal rule ensured that it played only a peripheral role in the debates of Laroui, Bénabou and their critics.⁵⁶ Yet students of the fifth and sixth centuries should not be blind to the implications of this dispute, and similar questions of political and social loyalty, of cultural affiliation, language and ethnicity need to be asked equally of each period. The Vandals, unlike the Romans, are rarely charged with imposing their own culture onto Africa. Indeed, the period is most frequently depicted as a struggle in which a ruling (Vandal) minority attempted to maintain its cultural identity at the risk of being subsumed by the Roman majority; a position apparently strengthened by Procopius' famous description of Vandals who had lost their martial spirit – and hence their identity – through exposure to the delights of Roman bathing.⁵⁷ While this image is certainly an improvement over a simple view of the Vandals as

⁵⁴ J. Diesner, *Das Vandalenreich. Aufstieg und Untergang* (Stuttgart, 1966).

⁵⁵ For a progress report, see F. M. Clover, 'Les Vandales. A Book in Progress', *Antiquité Tardive*, 10 (2002), pp. 73–4. Many of Clover's papers on Vandal Africa are collected in his *The Late Roman West and the Vandals* (Aldershot, 1992).

⁵⁶ Laroui covers the period rapidly in *L'histoire du Maghreb*, pp. 66–8; Bénabou is concerned almost entirely with the Imperial period.

⁵⁷ Mattingly and Hitchner, 'Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review', p. 211: 'The main difficulty for the Vandals was not primarily legitimacy, but one of cultural-ethnic survival (the basis of their political legitimacy) within a dominant culture'. A view which certainly correlates with that of Procopius, *BV.*, II.6.6–14.

destructive barbarians, the Vandal/Arian: Roman/Catholic oppositions which it implies scarcely do justice to the complexity of 'Roman' Africa in the period, or indeed, to the potential vivacity of Germanic culture.⁵⁸ Procopius, it might be remembered, was writing of a defeated *gens* in the best tradition of Tacitean moralizing, and sought to contrast the Vandals with the undefeated, and hence 'barbaric' *Mauri*. If the idea of a hegemonic Roman culture is no longer seen as appropriate to the understanding of relations with the Moors, then the application of the same model onto the Vandals deserves some criticism.

This is particularly true in the light of recent conceptual shifts in late antique studies elsewhere in the early medieval West. Over the last two decades, questions of settlement and ethnic interaction have been of paramount importance to this scholarly field, and have witnessed a sea-change in the way in which the early medieval period is understood and taught. Increasingly, students are encouraged to see the cultural affiliations of the fifth and sixth centuries, not as manifestations of long-standing political and ethnic groupings, but as constructed communities or 'strategies of distinction' in the ordering of a changing world.⁵⁹ While it would be an exaggeration to suggest that Vandal Africa has been completely severed from Germanic Europe in the study of the early medieval period, the potential of the area to help answer many broader questions remains largely untapped.⁶⁰ There are, of course, striking exceptions to this pattern. The ideological and political formation of Vandal Kingship, for example, has been particularly well studied, and may serve as a reference point for other scholars of the period.⁶¹ As already discussed, Africa has

⁵⁸ On this point, see now J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, 'Gens into Regnum: The Vandals', in H.-W. Goetz, et al. (eds), *Regna and Gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 81–3.

⁵⁹ The phrase comes from W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds), *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities 300–800* (Leiden, 1998), the second volume in the groundbreaking European Science Foundation Project on the Transformation of the Roman World. For a summary of the background and results of this project, see P. Delogu, 'Transformation of the Roman World: Reflections on Current Research', in E. Chrysos and I. N. Wood (eds), *East and West: Modes of Communication. Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 243–58, and T. F. X. Noble, 'The Transformation of the Roman World: Reflections on five years of work', in Chrysos and Wood (eds), *East and West: Modes of Communication*, pp. 259–77. For further discussion of the historiography surrounding this 'community construction', see also collected essays in A. Gillett (ed.) *On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicities in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2002).

⁶⁰ In the thirteen volumes of the Transformation project to date, only one essay has been primarily concerned with developments in North Africa – that of Liebeschuetz. That Europe forms the primary field of enquiry for the project is implicit in the remarks of Delogu, 'Transformation of the Roman World', p. 246 and Noble, 'The Transformation of the Roman World', pp. 259–60.

⁶¹ On this subject, see esp. Clover, 'Emperor Worship in Vandal Africa', in G. Wirth et al. (eds), *Romanitas-Christianitas* (Berlin, 1982), pp. 663–74, repr. in his *The Late Roman West and the Vandals* (Aldershot, 1992); 'Felix Karthago', and N. Duval, 'Culte monarchique dans l'Afrique vandale: culte des rois ou culte des empereurs?', *Revue des études Augustiniennes*, 30 (1984), pp. 269–73.

also had a central role to play in examining large-scale patterns in economic exchange and urban occupation undergone during the period. Yet despite these contributions, other important fields have been strangely neglected. It is only recently that Vandal Africa has been allowed to contribute fully to the ongoing debate over Germanic settlement within the empire, and much remains to be said.⁶² Questions of identity and self-definition within the region have also been largely overlooked, although thought-provoking work has been done on the identity of the *Alani*, and on the later demonization of the Vandals.⁶³ Happily, however, recent and current doctoral research on the region looks set to redress this imbalance further.⁶⁴ Self-evidently a kaleidoscope of different impulses – Vandal, Roman and Berber – fifth and sixth century Africa has much still to offer to the understanding of the late antique world.

THE SURVIVAL OF SOURCES

The contrast between the relative neglect of the Vandal kingdom and the huge body of scholarship focused upon Gothic and Frankish Europe is too frequently explained by a perceived shortage of evidence for fifth- and sixth-century Africa.⁶⁵ As has been noted, the development of late antique archaeology in Africa and the unrivalled survival of ostraka from the region offer a convincing refutation of this position, but such assertions are no more accurate with respect to more orthodox textual sources. The Vandals, we are told, never produced their ‘own’ historian in the model of Gregory of Tours, Jordanes or Bede.⁶⁶ Similarly, after Augustine’s death, the region never generated the mass of epistolary or hagiographic material upon which so much European early medieval scholarship has been based. Such assertions of source scarcity are illusory, however, and reflect little more than the

⁶² On this subject, compare Liebeschuetz, ‘*Gens into Regnum: The Vandals*’ and Y. Moderan, ‘L’établissement territorial des Vandales en Afrique’, with J. Durliat, ‘Cité, impôt et intégration des barbares’, in W. Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire. The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 153–80 and Schwarcz (Chapter 2 in the present volume).

⁶³ G. Gaggero, ‘Gli Alani nel Nord Africa’, *L’Africa romana*, 11 (1994), pp. 1637–42 discusses the Alans; See Claude Bourgeois, ‘Les Vandales, le vandalisme et l’Afrique’, *Ant. af.*, 16 (1980), pp. 213–28 on later associations of the name ‘Vandal’.

⁶⁴ See, for example, R. Steinacher, ‘Der Laterculus Regum Wandalorum et Alanorum. Eine afrikanische Ergaenzung der Chronik Prosper Tiros aus dem 6. Jahrhundert’, (unpubl. PhD, Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, 2001); J. P. Conant, ‘Staying Roman in Late Antique North Africa: Vandals, Moors, and Byzantines, c. 400–c. 700’ (unpubl. PhD, Harvard University, in progress) and G. M. Berndt, ‘Konflikt und Anpassung: Studien zu Migration und Ethnogenese der Vandalen’ (unpubl. PhD, Paderborn, in progress).

⁶⁵ Liebeschuetz, ‘*Gens into Regnum: The Vandals*’; An assertion rightly challenged by Y. Moderan, ‘Conclusions du colloque (7 Octobre 2000)’, I. L’époque Vandale’, *Antiquité Tardive*, 10 (2002), p. 57.

⁶⁶ Clover, ‘Felix Karthago’, p. 1.

fact that methodologies evolved in response to the peculiar source balance of medieval Europe – and specifically, perhaps, medieval Gaul – may not be directly transferable to contemporary Africa.

Historical, hagiographic and epistolary records do survive from fifth- and sixth-century Africa and have been fruitfully exploited by those historians who have engaged with them. Following Courtois' nuanced analysis of the *Historia Persecutionis*, for example, Victor of Vita's polemical account of oppressive Vandal rule has been systematically re-interpreted for the light which it casts upon the second half of the fifth century.⁶⁷ Although less immediately promising, similar work remains to be done on the chronicle of Victor of Tunnuna and the *Laterculus regum Vandalorum*, and on the accounts of Vandal history provided by Procopius and the western chroniclers of the fifth century.⁶⁸ These texts may not offer the richness of Gregory's *Decem Libri Historiarum*, but they are hardly negligible as sources, and it is as well to remember that the Gallic writer was the exception, rather than the rule, of early medieval historiography.

Whatever the shortcomings of Victor's *Historia Persecutionis* as an account of the secular Vandal state, its importance to the understanding of the fifth-century Church seems clear; all the more so because of the corroborative sources which may be assembled. An eclectic collection of religious material has survived from Vandal Africa, which, if less voluminous than the vast body of material from the same region in the fourth century, has certainly rewarded detailed analysis. The *Notitia Provinciarum et Civitatum Africae*, provides an annotated list of the bishops present at Huneric's Council of 484, and has consequently provided a keystone for prosopographical and analytical studies of the fifth-century Church, both in the

⁶⁷ Courtois, *Victor de Vita*, provides an obvious starting point for any study of the historian, to which must now be added the voluminous commentary and discussion in the new Budé edition of the text: S. Lancel, *Histoire de la persécution Vandale en Afrique*, Budé (Paris, 2002). On the text itself, see also A. Schwarcz, 'Bedeutung und Textüberlieferung der Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae des Victor von Vita', in A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter (eds), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 1994), pp. 115–40; W. E. Fahey, 'History, Community and Suffering in Victor of Vita', in D. Kries and C. Brown Tkacz (eds), *Nova Doctrina Vetusque. Essays on Early Christianity in Honor of Fredric W. Schlatter* (New York, 1999), pp. 225–41; S. Lancel, 'Victor de Vita témoin et chroniqueur des années noires de l'Afrique romaine au Ve siècle', *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (2000), pp. 1199–1219 and the study by Danuta Shanzer in Chapter 13 of the present volume. Several important studies have also drawn heavily upon the *Historia*, most notably R. W. Mathisen, 'Barbarian Bishops and the Churches 'in barbaricis gentibus' during Late Antiquity', *Speculum*, 72 (1997), pp. 664–95 (On Vandal Arian bishops) and Moderan, 'L'Afrique et la persécution vandale' (on the persecution).

⁶⁸ *Victoris Tunnunensis Chronicon cum reliquiis ex Consularibus Caesaraugustanis*, C. Cardelle de Hartman (ed.), CCSL, 173A (Turnhout, 2001); A. Placanica, *Vittore da Tunnuna. Chronica. Chiesa e Impero nell'età di Giustiniano* (Florence, 1997); On the western chronicles more generally, see S. Muhlberger, *The Fifth-Century Chroniclers. Prosper, Hydatius, and the Gallic Chronicler of 452* (Leeds, 1990); and see now Steinacher (in this volume) on the *LRV*.

regions under Vandal control and beyond.⁶⁹ The conciliar decrees to have survived from the same period similarly provide a view of a truly 'African' Church in operation.⁷⁰ The writings of Fulgentius of Ruspe, and Ferrandus' *Vita* of the saint, have been fruitfully exploited in recent years, and still have much to reveal regarding religious foundations, the idiosyncrasies of the Arian persecution and perhaps more intriguingly, relations with the evolving Berber states of the south.⁷¹ A commentary on *Job*, previously attributed to 'Pseudo-Origen' has recently been identified as a likely product of early sixth-century North Africa.⁷² As an illustration of the intellectual sophistication of the Arian Church, the commentary provides a much-needed counterpoint to assumptions that the Vandal faith was essentially moribund. In this light, much more could be made of the fragmentary works of the Arian Fastidiosus, preserved in the Fulgentian corpus.

As a result of this scholarship, the other religious writings of fifth- and sixth-century Africa are pregnant with possibility. Not least among these is the *Passio Baetissimorum martyrum*, apparently written in conscious emulation of Victor of Vita, which describes the further sufferings of Carthaginian Catholics under the Arian Vandals.⁷³ Far more could also be made of the implications of the wide-ranging polemics and sermons of the exiled Quodvultdeus and the extant theological tracts of the orthodox Cerealis.⁷⁴ For obvious reasons, the religious conflicts of the Vandal period have long been associated simply with the struggle between Arian and Nicene forms of observance, yet indigenous religious observance – the so-called 'Donatist' tradition – also proved to be long-lived. Consequently, the historical and theological material found in the *Liber Genealogus* editions of the fifth century might have similar importance to the

⁶⁹ *Notitia provinciarum et civitatum Africae*, S. Lancel (ed. and tr.) *Histoire De La Persécution Vandale En Afrique*, pp. 252–72, with discussion at pp. 223–51. See also J. -L. Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine*, Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana, 11 (Rome, 1973) and the important discussion in Y. Moderan, 'Les frontières mouvantes du royaume vandale', in C. Lepelley and X. Dupuis (eds), *Frontières et limites géographiques de l'Afrique du Nord antique. Hommage à Pierre Salama* (Paris, 1999), pp. 252–6.

⁷⁰ *Concilia Africae A.345 – A.525*, C. Munier (ed.), CCSL, 119 (Turnhout, 1974).

⁷¹ See, for example, S. T. Stevens, 'The Circle of Bishop Fulgentius', *Traditio*, 38 (1982), pp. 327–34; Y. Moderan, 'La chronologie de la vie de Saint Fulgence de Ruspe et ses incidences sur l'histoire de l'Afrique vandale', *MEFRA*, 105.1 (1993), pp. 135–88; and see also T. S. Ferguson, *Visita Nos. Reception, Rhetoric, and Prayer in a North African Monastery* (New York, 1999), who attributes the Psalter collects to Fulgentius on slightly questionable grounds.

⁷² L. Dossey, 'The Last Days of Vandal Africa. An Arian Commentary on Job and its Historical Context', *JThS*, n.s. 54.1 (2003), pp. 60–138.

⁷³ *Passio Baetissimorum martyrum*, S. Lancel (ed. and tr.) *Histoire de la persécution Vandale en Afrique*, pp. 213–20 and analysis at pp. 69–71. See also the brief discussion by Danuta Shanzer in Chapter 13 of the present volume

⁷⁴ *Opera Quodvultdeo Carthaginensi Episcopo tributa*, R. Braun (ed.), CCSL, 60 (Turnhout, 1976) and see also Quodvultdeus, *Livre des promesses et des prédictions de Dieu*, R. Braun (ed. and tr.), SC, 101–2 (Paris, 1964).

understanding of the Vandal world. In 438, 455 and 463, different versions of the work emerged from Carthage, with the intention of strengthening the resolve of African Christians in the face of new challenges. The books not only discuss the persecutions of the early Vandal period, and compare them to the sufferings of the past, but also contain intriguing summaries of recent imperial history and suggest a complex series of overlapping loyalties within Africa in the period.⁷⁵ If somewhat overshadowed by the voluminous primary literature on the controversies of the fourth century and by the almost incomprehensibly vast oeuvre of Augustine of Hippo, therefore, the religious compositions of fifth- and sixth-century Africa certainly compare favourably enough with those of Europe in the same period.⁷⁶

An important source of textual evidence is also to be found in the self-consciously 'literary' productions of the Vandal period. It was within this context that the African writer Martianus Capella produced his idiosyncratic *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, probably in the late fifth century.⁷⁷ Early in the following century, the grammarian Pompeius composed the *Commentum Artis Donati*, in an effort to provide linguistic instruction for his contemporaries.⁷⁸ Although both works have suffered from the opprobrium of modern scholars, and that of Pompeius certainly compares poorly with the exalted heights of North African writing in the classical period, the compositions do attest to a thriving intellectual community within the Vandal world. Martianus Capella's whistle-stop tour of classical mythology and natural history, and Pompeius' accessible guide to correct Latin usage were clearly written for a society in which grammarians remained important social figures, and *Romanitas* an active cultural ideal.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *Liber Genealogus*, T. Mommsen (ed.), MGH, AA, IX (Berlin, 1892), pp. 341–485. And see the important discussion in Paul Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de L'Afrique chrétienne. Depuis les origines jusqu'à l'invasion Arabe* (Paris, 1922), vol. 6, pp. 249–58; On the survival of 'Donatism' within the Vandal period, see R. A. Markus, 'The Problem of «Donatism» in the Sixth century', in *Gregorio Magno e il suo tempo* (Rome, 1991), 159–66; repr in his *Sacred and Secular: Studies on Augustine and Latin Christianity* (Aldershot, 1994).

⁷⁶ The bibliography on both Augustine and the Donatist controversy is, of course, too massive to cover here. On Augustine, the obvious starting point is P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London, 1967) and see now S. Lancel, *Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1999). On Donatism, compare Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford, 1952); A. R. Birley, 'Some notes on the Donatist schism', *Libyan Studies*, 18 (1987), pp. 29–41; M. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa. The Donatist World* (Minneapolis, MN, 1997) and the important comments of B. D. Shaw, 'African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions and "Donatists"', in M. R. Greenshields and T. A. Robinson (eds), *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Religious Movements: Discipline and Dissent* (Lampeter, 1992), pp. 5–34; repr. in his *Rulers, Nomads and Christians in Roman North Africa* (Aldershot, 1995).

⁷⁷ D. Shanzer, *A Philosophical and Literary Commentary on Martianus Capella's De Nuptiis Philologiae Et Mercurii, Book I* (Berkeley, CA, 1986).

⁷⁸ Pompeius is discussed in detail by R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), pp. 139–68.

⁷⁹ The continued importance of Latin education in the Vandal period is discussed by Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West. From the Sixth through the Eighth Centuries*, tr. J. J. Contreni (Columbia, 1976). See also the discussion of literacy by Jonathan Conant in this volume.

These ideals were put to more practical use within the heterogeneous verses collected in the *Latin Anthology* in around 530, and in the separate works of the poet Dracontius. Regarded together, this material rivals almost any comparable collection from late Roman Africa or from post-Roman Europe.⁸⁰ Even the purely literary pieces within this canon have much to say regarding patterns of education, taste and cultural affiliation within late antique Carthage. Those pieces with a political or religious content, including several celebrations of Hasding and Vandal prowess, draw the historian to the interface between different cultures and different societies.⁸¹ The very fact that the *Anthology* was compiled in the last years of the Vandal kingdom or in the first years of Byzantine rule itself demands important questions of the political status of verse within the period. In purely literary terms, Dracontius and his successors were perhaps less accomplished than were the Gallic poets Ausonius and Sidonius Apollinaris, but their compositions have much to reveal about the ideals and aspirations of Vandal Africa, and the society that produced them.

After the death of Augustine, no North African writer compiled a letter collection comparable to those of Ruricius of Limoges or Sidonius Apollinaris in contemporary Gaul, but important epistolary material has survived from the region, and several outside texts have direct relevance to our understanding of North Africa. The bishop and historian Theodoret of Cyrrhus communicated at length with Carthaginian exiles during the early part of the Vandal period, and his letters illuminate the extent to which matters African continued to resonate throughout the Mediterranean world.⁸² Fulgentius also sought to reassure African Christians during his own period of exile and acted as effective secretary to the exiled bishops in Sardinia; consequently, his letters, and those of his biographer Ferrandus, are of considerable interest.⁸³ No less important are the fragmentary survivals which hint at more widespread epistolary activity within Africa itself. The warm correspondence between the African bishop Parthemius and the (otherwise unknown) Sigisteus, for example, provide a brief glimpse of relations between episcopal and secular aristocracies.⁸⁴ Similarly, three letters previously attributed to Pseudo-Sulpicius Severus but now recognized to have been likely productions of

⁸⁰ On literature during the Vandal period, see Chapters 5, 6 and 7 by Gregory Hays, Judith George and Andy Merrills, respectively in the present volume, and D. F. Bright *The Miniature Epic in Vandal Africa* (Norman, OK, 1987).

⁸¹ On this subject, see H. Laaksonen, 'L'educazione a la trasformazione della cultura nel regno dei Vandali', *L'Africa romana*, 7.1 (1990), pp. 357–61 and Chapter 6 by Judith George in the present volume.

⁸² Theodoret, *Epistolae*, Y. Azéma (ed. and tr.), SC, 40 (Paris, 1955), pp. 29–36, 52–3 and 70.

⁸³ Fulgentius, *Epistulae*, in J. Fraipont (ed.), CCSL, 91 and 91A (Turnhout, 1974) and translated in R. B. Eno (ed. and tr.) *Fulgentius. Selected Works* Fathers of the Church, 95 (Washington DC, 1997). Ferrandus, *Epistolae*, A. Hamman (ed.), PL Supplementa, 4 (Paris, 1967), cols. 36–9.

⁸⁴ Sigisteus, *Epistola ad Parthemium*, and Parthemius, *Rescriptum ad Sigisteum*, in A. Hamman (ed.), PL Supplementa, 3 (Paris, 1963), cols 447–9.

the Vandal kingdom, reveal myriad contemporary tensions from Catholic apostasy to land-holding disputes.⁸⁵

The richest seam of material for the understanding of fifth- and sixth-century Africa, however, is undoubtedly the epigraphic source-base. The analysis of inscriptions has been of central methodological importance in writing the history of Roman North Africa, and although the volume of this material declines into the fifth and sixth centuries, the stones of the period still have much to say.⁸⁶ It is epigraphic analysis, quite as much as archaeological or textual study, that lies at the heart of the revised histories of the Berber kingdoms. Epigraphy has also been of primary importance in the reconstruction of Christian life in rural Africa, and particularly of the survival and spread of saints' cults.⁸⁷

Similar, if less voluminous, epigraphic sources have been crucial in developing prosopographical studies of Vandal Africa, in assessing the continuity of political organization, and in identifying patterns of continuity in civic and administrative life.⁸⁸ In a recent study of the late Roman West, which relied heavily upon such material alongside other textual sources, P. S. Barnwell rightly noted that North Africa is second only to Gaul in the volume of material that is available for the understanding of the fifth century.⁸⁹ A greater appreciation of the riches that Africa has to offer – in epigraphic, archaeological and textual material – can only expand understanding of the region.

⁸⁵ Ps.-Sulpicius Severus, *Epistula ad Salvium*, C. Halm (ed.), CSEL, 1 (Vienna, 1866), pp. 251–6. On the identification of these letters as North African, see C. Lepelley, 'Trois documents méconnus retrouvés parmi les spuria de Sulpice Sévère', *Ant. Af.*, 25 (1989), pp. 235–62. Legal aspects are discussed by B. Sirks, 'The Farmer, the Landlord and the Law in the Fifth Century', in R. Mathisen (ed.), *Law, Society and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 256–71. The letters are available in English translation in A. Roberts (ed. and tr.), *Sulpicius Severus, Vincent of Lérins, John Cassian*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 11 (Oxford, 1894), pp. 68–70.

⁸⁶ On the centrality of epigraphic studies to North African scholarship since the mid-nineteenth century, and some of the unfortunate ramifications of this bias, see Shaw, 'Archaeology and Knowledge', pp. 32–3. For an overview of African epigraphy from the third to the seventh centuries, see N. Duval 'L'épigraphie funéraire chrétienne d'Afrique: traditions et ruptures, constantes et diversités', in A. Donati (ed.), *La Terza età dell'epigrafia* (Faenza, 1988), pp. 265–314.

⁸⁷ Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae: le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IV^e au VII^e siècle*. 2 vols (Rome, 1982), and see also Frend in Chapter 12 of the present volume.

⁸⁸ B. H. Warmington, *The North African Provinces from Diocletian to the Vandal Conquest* (Cambridge, 1954), pp. 27–54 and C. Lepelley, *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire*. 2 vols (Paris, 1979–81) both demonstrate the significance of fourth-century inscriptions for the understanding of urban life. For the potential of the same sources for Vandal prosopography, see J. Diesner, 'Prolegomena zu einer Prosopographie des Vandalenreiches', *Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft*, 17 (1968), pp. 1–15 and, of course, *PCBE*.

⁸⁹ P. S. Barnwell, *Emperors, Prefects and Kings. The Roman West, 395–565* (London, 1992), p. 114: 'There is one provincial area of the western Empire in the fifth century which lay outside the Gallic prefecture about which there is sufficient source material for a meaningful discussion to be possible – namely, Africa.'

THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE PRESENT VOLUME

The present collection is intended to address several of the issues discussed above, and more broadly to highlight the potential of fifth- and sixth-century North Africa as a field for further study. It should be stressed at once, however, that the volume makes no claim to comprehensiveness. There are methodological approaches and substantial areas of enquiry which have remained untouched within the collection. Indeed, the reader already familiar with some of the issues of fifth- and sixth-century Africa will rapidly identify fascinating fields for discussion and analysis which have been treated only in passing, or would seem to have been neglected entirely. Conversely, it is hoped that the same reader will discover in the chapters that follow a number of unexpected new conclusions regarding familiar texts, and the introduction or re-introduction of some unusual or forgotten sources of evidence. For the reader more familiar with the world of late antique Europe, or with different periods of Maghrebi history, it is hoped that the chapters will provide some suggestion of the unique fascinations to be found in the study of fifth- and sixth-century Africa. In this sense it is the subtitle of the present collection – historiographical cliché that it may be – which provides the most accurate impression of the aspirations of the volume. By adopting new perspectives on a complex field of study, it is hoped that the authors collected herein will provide yet more reflections from the multi-faceted world of late antique Africa.

The collection is loosely divided into three parts, each of which considers issues of particular relevance in current scholarship on late Antiquity. The first of these is devoted to issues of identity, group cohesion and political formulation within early medieval Africa. Drawing upon his ground-breaking scholarship on early medieval identity, **Walter Pohl** examines the prehistory of the Vandals and Alans, from their fleeting and contradictory appearances in the classical sources to their settlement in Africa; a contemporary re-creation of 'l'épopée Vandale'. Pohl stresses the fluidity of Vandal and Alan identity, and the extent to which this changed during the occupation of Africa. **Andreas Schwarcz** provides a closer analysis of Vandal settlement patterns, and integration with the indigenous populations, once within Africa. The issue of barbarian settlement has been a much debated one since the publication of Walter Goffart's seminal studies of Gallic and Italian society in the 1980s. In his essay, Schwarcz expands upon the theories of Goffart and Jean Durliat within a North African context, and engages with the recent scholarship of Yves Modéran on the practicalities and ramifications of integration.

Andy Blackhurst and **Alan Rushworth** consider contemporary Berber state formation, from the late fourth to the eighth and ninth centuries. Blackhurst takes as his focus the polities established under Firmus and Gildo – two brothers successively castigated as rebels against Rome by imperial sources. He argues that a more accurate image of these figures would locate them within the regional politics of empire, that each upheld his own loyalties to different dynasties, and that their

condemnation resulted more from the successful machinations of rival factions at court than from any secessionist aspirations on the part of the North Africans themselves. Rushworth examines the changes undergone in the pre-desert regions at the southern frontier of the empire. Taking the example of a polity based near Tiaret, in what is now western Algeria, these successor states are shown to have a dual structure based on the exploitation of the military manpower of the Moorish tribes in the former frontier zone on the one hand, and the fiscal resources of the Romanized provincials on the other. Rushworth goes on to argue that the identity of the pre-Saharan populations was essentially fluid, and changed in response to shifting political circumstances and the exploitation of new opportunities.

The second part of the collection turns from political to cultural identity, and to the different forms of literary texts to survive from the period. **Gregory Hays**, **Judith George** and **Andy Merrills** all focus upon the substantial literary corpus to have survived from Vandalic North Africa. Hays argues that this work, varied as it is, displays uniquely African cultural concerns, which may be traced back to Apuleius in the second century and forward to Fulgentius ‘the Mythographer’ in the seventh. Despite the massive political changes undergone by the region, and the changes in patronage to which the poets of Africa had to adapt, an ‘African’ voice may certainly be heard. It is to these patrons that George and Merrills then devote themselves. Merrills suggests that the poet Dracontius, long regarded as an imperial sympathizer against a hated Vandal regime, may in fact have been happy to turn his verses to the celebration of the Arian minority, and offers some suggestions regarding the likely nature of the infamous lost poem for which the writer was imprisoned. George, similarly, argues that the Vandalic aristocracy of the early sixth century had more in common with their predecessors and neighbours than has frequently been assumed. Through discussion of the *Latin Anthology*, and comparison with both the material remains from the period and the comparable corpus of Venantius Fortunatus’ late sixth-century Gallic verse, George paints an image of a sophisticated Vandal aristocracy, fully receptive to the cultural opportunities offered by their new homeland.

Latin poetry enjoyed an unusual renaissance within the Vandalic period, but the historical compositions of Africa are no less important to our understanding of the fifth and sixth centuries. In his contribution, **Roland Steinacher** reintroduces one of the most neglected historical texts of the period – the *Laterculus Regum Vandalorum et Alanorum*. Steinacher provides a new edition of the text, a discussion of its transmission, and argues that this neglected continuation of Prosper’s Chronicle must have been an African composition. He goes on to offer some suggestions regarding the significance of the text for the illumination of Vandal-period Africa.

The remaining chapters within the section are concerned with still different forms of textual evidence. The survival of wooden tablets and ostraka from North Africa provide an essential resource to the understanding of the economy and quotidian life of the region. Yet like all texts, the authorship and function of these sources is of

paramount importance to their appreciation. In her chapter, **Jacqueline Godfrey** discusses the survival of the ostraka from the Ilot d'Amirauté in Carthage, dating from 372AD. She argues that these texts were important documents within the administrative operations involved in the collection, storage and distribution for export of the African *annona* in olive oil. By careful analysis of the miniscule cursive writing-style upon them, and by comparison with other contemporary evidence for handwriting, the bureaucratic background to *annona* operations is explored. In the following chapter, **Jonathan Conant** turns his attention to the famous Albertini Tablets; one of the few collections of such documents to have been fully published. Conant suggests that the witnesses to these property transactions offer an invaluable perspective upon levels of literacy among prosperous peasant cultivators, both within the frontier zone of Vandal Africa, and in the early medieval West more broadly.

The final part of the collection is devoted to the study of the Church, and seeks to challenge many long-held assumptions regarding Christian activity within the period. Despite some important criticism, the stereotype remains of 'Donatist' schismatics, linked both to independence movements for Africa, and to the 'circumcellion' lunatic fringe. This image has been opposed in the past by **Brent Shaw**, and the same writer returns to the dispute here. Shaw argues that the modern image of the *circumcelliones* is based largely upon exaggerated and stereotyped images of the group composed outside Africa. He traces the representation of the group through the heresiological literature, and suggests that it rapidly became a trope of extremism, and picked up a variety of improbable associations. He maintains that such representations need to be discarded from future attempts to analyse the social dimensions of circumcellion violence in its African context.

Further assumptions suggest that the successive conquests of the Vandals, Byzantines and Arabs both fundamentally affected the expression of Christianity within the North African provinces and led ultimately to its decline. The fourth century has long been regarded as the climax of North African Christianity, but the faith, in various guises continued to flourish throughout the region for half a millennium or more. **W. H. C. Frend**, undoubtedly one of the most influential figures in modern scholarship on North African Christianity, discusses the importance of local martyr cults to the evolution of the Church. He describes the importance of the early martyr acts to the development of the faith in the Roman period, and discusses how these patterns changed in response to the 'Donatist' crisis, and to the successive Vandal and Byzantine occupations of the region, through both the revival of African martyr narratives, and the introduction of external cults.

That the cult of the martyr was a central weapon in the Nicene resistance to Arian persecution is demonstrated by **Danuta Shanzer**. Her essay argues that Victor of Vita's *Historia* was not merely a disinterested narrative of Huneric's persecution, but was rather an active attempt to represent Nicene suffering in martyrological terms. Elsewhere in the piece, Shanzer offers new perspectives on the construction

of authorial identity within the text and provides a new interpretation of the historical significance of the prologue to the piece.

It is appropriate that the final essay in the collection takes the history of North Africa beyond the chronological parameters of late Antiquity and deep into the Islamic period. In it, **Mark Handley** reminds students of the early medieval period that the death of African Christianity has been much exaggerated. For a century or more, scholars have sought explanations for the rapid demise of one of the most important Christian provinces in the theological disputes and political events of late Antiquity. It has been argued that the Vandals, Byzantines and Berbers represented poor guardians for a Church repeatedly beset by schism and theological controversy. Through a discussion of the literary and epigraphic evidence from the fifth to the eleventh centuries, Handley argues that the Church remained an active force within the region. He demonstrates the vivacity of the faith in the Berber heartlands, and its surprising longevity in the face of the obvious impulses to convert to Islam. This essay, like all of those collected in the present volume, seeks to present late antique Africa, not as a catastrophic interlude between the 'golden ages' of Roman and Islamic occupation, but as a dramatic collision of disparate cultural and social traditions.

PART 1

AFRICAN IDENTITIES

Chapter 1

The Vandals: Fragments of a Narrative

Walter Pohl

The name of the Vandals is one among a number of ethnonyms (along with those of the Goths, Burgundians and Rugians) that appear in identical or similar form in eastern *Germania* in the first and second centuries AD, as post-Roman kingdoms in the fifth century, and as regional or tribal names in medieval Scandinavia (and/or as islands in the Baltic Sea).¹ In traditional scholarship, the interpretation was simple: these were peoples who had migrated from prehistoric Scandinavia across the Baltic Sea to the continent where they settled in the early imperial age, marching on into Roman provinces in the course of the Great Migration of the fourth to sixth centuries. Debate was limited to the chronology of migrations, and whether parts of a people had stayed behind in Scandinavia, or wandered back at a later date.²

Only from the 1960s did this linear migration narrative begin to fragment. Not only was there a complete lack of historical sources for a migration from Scandinavia (as might be expected), but the archaeological evidence also directly contradicted it, as there was no sign of mass movements from Scandinavia to eastern Germania around the turn of our era.³ R. Wenskus offered an alternative explanation: that only small groups, whom he called *Traditionskerne* (kernels of tradition), migrated, inspiring a new ethnogenesis under a familiar name that now came to indicate a group of quite different origin.⁴ Since then, scholarship has

¹ For a general discussion of the problems of ethnic continuity, and of many aspects of the topic treated here, see W. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung und Integration* (Stuttgart, 2002); see also idem, *Die Germanen* (Munich, 2000).

² For a classical overview of the older debate in German, see L. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen* (Leipzig, 1901, repr. Munich, 1942), *Die Ostgermanen* (Munich, 1935, repr. 1941), *Die Westgermanen* (Munich, 1938, repr. 1940).

³ R. Hachmann, *Die Goten und Skandinavien* (Berlin, 1970); V. Bierbrauer, 'Archäologie und Geschichte der Goten vom 1.–7. Jahrhundert. Versuch einer Bilanz', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 28 (1994), pp. 51–171.

⁴ R. Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung. Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen gentes*. 2nd edn (Cologne/Vienna, 1977) (he did not yet use the term 'ethnogenesis' but *Stammesbildung*, tribal formation). Wenskus' model was further developed by H. Wolfram, *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie*, 4th edn (Munich, 2000), translated into English as Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, tr. T. Dunlap (Berkeley, CA, 1988). Both Wenskus and Wolfram recently came under attack in A. Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity – Critical Approaches to Ethnogenesis Theory* (Turnhout, 2002), especially in the contributions by A.C. Murray and W. Goffart. For a summary of this debate, see W. Pohl, 'Ethnicity, theory and tradition: a response', in the same volume, pp. 221–40.

moved one step further. It has been suggested that ethnonyms may also have been taken from a limited stock of familiar and perhaps prestigious names, without necessarily indicating any direct relationship between different groups of the same (or similar) name. Obviously, individual cases differed greatly. In late Antiquity, sudden or long-term limited mass migrations, movements of small groups and individuals, or the spread of names and identities among previously unrelated groups all played a role. Gothic migrations and identity formations are a case in point, ranging from a gradual shift of settlement areas in the second and third centuries AD and mass movements of refugees from the Huns in the fourth century, to military expeditions and diffused claims of Gothic 'status' in the fifth.⁵ As early as the sixth century, retrospective narratives straightened out this variety into a linear ethnic history, developed further by modern historiography. Such narratives have now become much more patchy, although they have not simply dissolved: stories, however fragmentary, can still be told.

For the Vandals, that means that we cannot take their 'Vandal' identity for granted over time nor fill in chronological gaps and draw equations over large distances. Vandal identity was anything but clear-cut in the beginning. A review of the sources for the first centuries of our era shows that there is a considerable amount of ambiguity and misunderstanding connected with the Vandals in particular. Authors writing at the time of the early Roman Empire mention the *Vandilii* (or similar) in eastern Germania. The name *Vandilii* later changed to *Vandali* (as in the case of *Gutones/Gothi*, and unlike that of the *Burgundiones* and the *Rugii*). What that means for ethnic continuity remains obscure. The ethnic landscape in the regions around the Oder and Vistula rivers is further complicated by the use of some ethnonyms as umbrella terms for larger agglomerations comprising several other names. Pliny, for example, counts among the *Vandili* the most important peoples of eastern Germania – the *Burgundiones*, *Varines*, *Charines* and *Gutones*.⁶ Conversely, in Tacitus, 'the genuine and ancient name' of the *Vandilii*, referred to in the second chapter of the *Germania*, does not appear in his list of peoples at all. Instead he names the *Lugi* as the main ethnic group, with the *Harii* and the *Naharnavali* belonging to them; he classes the *Gutones* as an independent group, along with *Rugi* and *Lemovii*, while the Burgundians are missing. In the second-century work of Ptolemy, completely different names for the peoples of the *Lugi* are to be found, perhaps due to discrepancies in the transmission of the text.⁷ Ptolemy does not name the Vandals at all, but includes the *Burgundiones*. He also knows of the *Silingi*, who are still referred to in the migration period as a sub-group of the Vandals. Since the majority of these groups were to be found in the southerly and westerly regions of modern-day Poland, it was often assumed that the name of *Lugi* (which disappeared in the third century) might

⁵ Pohl, *Völkerwanderung*, esp. p. 24; see also Wolfram, *Goten*; P. J. Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford, 1996).

⁶ Pliny, *HN.*, IV. 98.

⁷ Ptol., *Geog.*, II, 11, 10.

be a pre-Germanic foreign term used for those peoples who named themselves *Vandilii*. Ptolemy, however, does not count the *Silingi* amongst the Lugi at all. Thus, instead of the fixed classifications proposed in the older literature, we are obliged to take into account a considerable elasticity when dealing with descriptions of larger agglomerations. This flexibility is also demonstrated in the case of the *Suebi*, a term whose extension changes drastically in the period between Caesar and Tacitus.⁸

The *Vandilii* (but not only this group) lived at the time of the early Roman Empire in a cultural area defined by archaeologists as the Przeworsk culture, which was formed in the second century BC and stretched from Silesia to both banks of the Middle and Upper Vistula.⁹ In the second century AD, this culture spread across the Carpathian Mountains to the upper Tisza River. This archaeological evidence should not be used for ethnic identifications without considerable care, but together with the expansion of the Wielbark culture – roughly coextensive with the area of the *Gutones* – it corresponds with the historical sources which affirm that during the period of the Marcomannic wars, peoples living north of the Carpathians started pressing southward. Warrior groups of the *Vandilii* began to launch advances upon the imperial territory and upon other peoples. Excerpts from the chronicle of Cassius Dio, produced in the fifth century, tell of how at the time of Marcus Aurelius ‘the *Astingi*, whose leaders were Raus and Raptus, came to settle in Dacia, in the hope of being accepted as allies and thereby receiving money and land’.¹⁰ The Emperor Aurelian is reported to have defeated Vandals in the third century,¹¹ and the group also fought against the Marcomanni.¹² In the fourth century, as Jordanes reports, the Goths attacked the Vandals, who, under the leadership of Visimar, *Asdingorum stirpe* (‘of Hasding lineage’), were living along the banks of the Tisza.¹³ Both the Gothic origin legend, transmitted in Jordanes’ *Getica*,¹⁴ and also that of the Lombards, places a battle against Vandals at the beginning of the migration narrative. In the *Origo gentis Langobardum*, written down in the seventh century, the battle against the Vandals is crucial to establishing Lombard identity.¹⁵

⁸ Pohl, *Germanen*, pp. 90–92.

⁹ K. Godłowski, *The Chronology of the Late Roman and Early Migration Period in the Central Europe* (Cracow, 1970); M. Mączyńska, *Die Völkerwanderung. Geschichte einer ruhelosen Epoche* (Düsseldorf/Zurich, 1993).

¹⁰ Dio Cass., 71, 12; cf. 71, 11.

¹¹ Dexippos, F. Jacoby (ed.) *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*. Zweiter Teil. Zeitgeschichte A (Leiden, 1961), fr. 7.

¹² Dio Cass., 77, 20.

¹³ Jordanes, *Getica*, XXII, 113f = Dexippos, fr. 30.

¹⁴ Jordanes, *Getica*, XXII, 113ff.

¹⁵ *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, G. Waitz (ed.), MGH, SRL (Hannover, 1878), c. 1; Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, L. Bethmann and G. Waitz (eds), MGH, SRL (Hannover, 1878), I. 8. Cf. W. Pohl, ‘Origo gentis (Langobarden)’, in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*. 2nd. edn, 22 (Berlin/New York, 2003), pp. 183–8; idem, ‘Memory, identity and power in Lombard Italy’, in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 9–28.

Reports since the fifth century attest the name *Hasdingi* as that of Geiseric's dynasty, and Jordanes understood the same from his source, Dexippos. Did the name denote a Vandal sub-group before the migration? Or do the two passages in the excerpts from Cassius Dio and Jordanes simply reflect 'knowledge and contemporary bias of Cassiodorus' time'?¹⁶ Still, the assumption of the existence of a Hasding group among the Vandals during the third to fourth centuries remains entirely plausible. At any rate, it should not be overlooked that the pre-supposed Silingi–Hasdingi dualism to be found in modern reconstructions does not appear in the sources. The Silingi are only mentioned in passing before the crossing to Africa, for the last time in Hydatius.¹⁷ The Hasdingi are thereafter principally referred to as a royal lineage. The origin of the Vandals from the regions to the north of the Carpathian Mountains was no longer known to later authors. Procopius believed them to have come from the Maiotis – the Sea of Asov – and counted them amongst the Gothic peoples to whom, in his opinion, they compared in appearance, and in their laws, language, and Arian religion.¹⁸

When Stilicho, the Vandal in service to the Romans, began his career at the Imperial Court in the 380s, his people still lived at some distance from the boundaries of the empire. In modern research, two distinguishable groups are referred to: the Silingi, approximately to the north of the Carpathian Mountains in what later became Silesia (the regional name *Schlesien*, Silesia, can be traced back to them through Slavic forms), and the Hasdingi along the upper Tisza and in the adjoining Carpathian countries.¹⁹ Between them, the Marcomanni and Quadi had already lived for centuries in what is today the Czech Republic and western Slovakia. The Vandals' eastern neighbours were Goths, Gepids and Alans who lived under Hun rule inside and outside the Transylvanian Carpathian chain.

Where the various peoples beyond the Roman frontiers settled in the fourth century has been discussed largely on the basis of the archaeological evidence. This is not easy given the rather homogeneous culture of eastern-central European barbarians of the period, still mostly referred to as *Ostgermanen* – Eastern Germanic peoples. It is, however, quite obvious that the patterns of settlement in the regions inhabited by Marcomanni and Quadi, which had continued for centuries during the time of the Roman Empire, break off around 400, and only sporadic evidence of settlement from the first half of the fifth century is available. Phase D1 from the final quarter of the fourth century presents clearly recognizable evidence of shifts in population from the Ukrainian Černjachov culture to the middle Danube. In north-west Transylvania and on the upper Tisza, a mixed population can be

¹⁶ H. Castritius, 'Hasdingen', in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*. 2nd. edn, 14 (Berlin/New York, 1999), pp. 26–8, who rejects the idea that the Hasdingi were a pre-migration *Teilstamm* of the Vandals.

¹⁷ Hydatius, n. 49, a. 411.

¹⁸ Procopius, *BV.*, I.1.2.

¹⁹ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 21ff.; H.-J. Diesner, *Das Vandalenreich. Aufstieg und Untergang* (Stuttgart, 1966); H. Wolfram, *Das Reich und die Germanen. Zwischen Antike und Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1990), p. 230ff.

detected that combines elements of the Černjachov and Șintâna de Mureș cultures further east with influences of the Przeworsk culture from the area north of the Carpathians. Roughly in the same region, around the year 400, the 'northern Carpathian group' spread out across the Slovakian Carpathian passes toward the south. This group is more closely associated with the Przeworsk culture, whose centre at this time lay in Silesia and Southern Poland. Social transformation in the later stages of the Černjachov culture becomes apparent through changes in burial-customs; cremation becomes less common, inhumation becomes more widespread and grave-goods also become more usual in the Przeworsk culture.²⁰

Much of this took place in connection with changes in the sphere of the Goths. Just how useful a detailed ethnic classification of the material record might be is debateable from case to case. What becomes clear is that along the middle reaches of the Danube, from the north, as from the east, new groups were appearing, and barbarians of (in the ancient sense) 'Gothic' and 'Germanic' origins were intermingling. The ethnic cohesion of the individual 'Gothic' peoples to a certain extent dissolved over time; new communities and temporary alliances were taking form. In the written sources, Vandal groups appear repeatedly together with other ethnic groups. That was the background from which the Vandal migrations emerged.

Shortly after 400, to the north of the middle and lower Danube, dramatic transformations must have taken place, which we can only gauge from their consequences. At nearly the same point in time a large, heterogeneous group of Gothic peoples led by Radagaisus set out for Italy (405), and a group of at least the same size comprising Vandals, Alans and Suebi started out for Gaul (406). Procopius²¹ blames hunger as the stimulus; however, the cause for these migrations was most likely to have been pressure from the Huns (as was the case a quarter of a century earlier, when large bands of Goths crossed the lower Danube). It can be assumed that by this time significant Hun contingents had settled in the Carpathian basin and were making their ruling presence felt.²² Moreover, the successes of the Goths on imperial territory are likely to have stimulated new hopes among the barbarians. The Alans, who had, for a considerable time, been living to the north of the Caucasus and the Black Sea, were in 375 the first who had submitted to the Huns. Alan federates were already, since the settlement of the Alatheus-Saphrax group, settled together with Goths and Huns in Pannonia. Now an Alanic group of considerable proportions was setting out toward the West.²³ Parts of the

²⁰ J. Tejral, 'The problem of acculturation at the beginning of the migration period', in M. Mączyńska and T. Grabarczyk (eds), *Die spätrömische Kaiserzeit und die frühe Völkerwanderungszeit in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Łódź, 2000), pp. 5–31; M. Mączyńska, 'Die Endphase der Przeworsk-Kultur', *Ethnographisch-archäologische Zeitschrift*, 39 (1998) pp. 65–99; Bierbrauer, 'Archäologie und Geschichte der Goten'.

²¹ Procopius, *BV.*, I.3.

²² P. J. Heather, 'The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe', *English Historical Review*, 110 (1995), pp. 4–41.

²³ B. Bachrach, *A History of the Alans in the West from their First Appearance in the Sources of Classical Antiquity through the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN, 1973).

Marcomanni and Quadi who now became known by the old name of Suebi (as were those of them who remained settled along the middle Danube where they eventually fell under Lombard rule, and where their presence is attested until 568) came to join the numbers of the Vandals and Alans. In a letter written shortly afterwards to Ageruchia, Jerome gives a long list of peoples who had descended upon Gaul in 406–07: Quadi, Vandals, Sarmatians, Alans, Gepids, Eruli, Saxons, Burgundians, Alemanni, as well as provincials of Pannonia.²⁴ Thus a significant number of the populations of the Carpathian regions from Silesia and Bohemia to Transylvania forced its way into the empire; other groups living along the right bank of the Rhine also seem to have exploited the opportunity. It is possible that a number of the Vandals had already been in Raetia, where Stilicho is believed to have closed a contract with them, since 400.²⁵

As the loose confederation of Vandals, Alans and Suebi advanced towards the Rhine, they met a Frankish army dispatched by the Romans. The Hasding king Godegisel fell, and was succeeded by his son Gunderic. Up to a few tens of thousands of people crossed the Rhine in 406–07 (on New Year's Eve according to one, perhaps not too reliable, source).²⁶ Stilicho seems to have recalled some of the Roman troops based in Gaul back to Italy in order to reduce the risk of renewed usurpations and to reinforce the fight against Gothic invasions.²⁷ The Barbarians moved through Gaul for about two years without encountering notable resistance. Jerome, staying in far-off Palestine at the time but usually well informed about the course of events in the West, bewailed the devastations and listed a number of raided cities, including Mainz (where large numbers of believers were massacred in the Church), Speyer, Worms (after lengthy siege), Strasbourg, Tournai, Reims and many cities in the southern provinces; Toulouse was, according to his accounts, only spared through the endeavours of Bishop Exuperius.²⁸ Otherwise, we know little about the course of events. Later Saints' Lives reported the miraculous deliverance of their cities from Vandals attacks, or the martyrdom of their saints,²⁹ as happened with Attila's invasion in 451; but such texts can mostly only be traced back to the Carolingian period at the earliest. Shortly after Stilicho's overthrow he was accused of having stirred up the Vandals against the Empire.³⁰ Still, Roman life

²⁴ Jerome, *Ep.*, 123.

²⁵ Claudian, *De bello Gothico*, v. 415; the interpretation depends on the reading of the passage, 'Vandalicis' or 'Vindelicis' (the second option was preferred by the Loeb translator M. Platnauer).

²⁶ Oros. *Hist.*, VII.40.3; Marcellinus Comes a. 408; *Auctarium Havniense*, T. Mommsen (ed.), MGH, AA, IX (Berlin, 1892), a. 406; Prosper, *Chron.* n. 1230, a. 406; Zosimus, VI.3; Procopius, *BV.*, I.3.23. A reliable overview of the sources is found in F. Miltner, 'Vandalen', in *Realencyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaften*, Suppl. VIII. A.1 (1955), pp. 298–335.

²⁷ W. Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London, 1989), pp. 20ff.

²⁸ Jerome, *Ep.*, 123; Greg. Tur., *LH.*, II.2. Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 38ff.; P. Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques*. 3rd edn (Paris, 1963), pp. 79ff.

²⁹ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 44ff.

³⁰ e.g. Oros. *Hist.*, VII.40.3; Marcellinus Comes, a. 408, 1.

continued in Gaul.³¹ In the year 409 the Vandals, Alans and Suebi pushed across the Pyrenees to the Iberian Peninsula, leaving only a number of Alans to remain in Gaul.³²

Hispania had, until that point, remained relatively safe from barbarian invasions, but the power struggles for the Roman Empire had had a detrimental effect on the country. The Vandal plunderings brought with them famine and epidemics, so that the chronicler Hydatius claimed to see apocalyptic signals.³³ In spite of this, a peace agreement was soon reached; at first, the barbarians' partners were usurpers. It is supposed that a division of the barbarians between the Hispanic provinces was achieved in 411. If Hydatius' accounts are to be believed, then the Alans received by far the largest part, Lusitania (roughly modern day Portugal) and Carthaginensis (a part of the Mediterranean coast along with the hinterland), the Silingi the rich Baetica (modern-day Andalusia), whilst the remaining Vandals and Suebi divided the barren Gallaecia in the north-western reaches of the peninsula among themselves. Tarraconensis – what is modern-day Catalonia – remained untouched despite the division of the lands (the Visigoths, led by Athaulf, moved in here a short time later).³⁴ What is striking about this arrangement, besides the predominance of the Alans, is that the Vandals were settled apart from one another, and the Hasding royal lineage, from which Geiseric and his successors descended, only received a very modest share of land. Their part was more remote, which would soon prove itself to be an advantage; since under the orders of the empire, Wallia's Goths attacked the Alans and Silingi, inflicting heavy losses on them.³⁵ After the death of their king, the Alans were forced to join the Hasding Gunderic. Only at this point do the Hasdings truly seem to have asserted their supremacy, as they attacked the Suebi and spread southward in various battles against Roman armies. Having advanced to the coast, they went on to plunder even the Balearic Islands. Gunderic died in 428 and was succeeded by Geiseric.

³¹ J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (eds), *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2003); R. Mathisen and D. Shantzer (eds), *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul. Revisiting the Sources* (Aldershot, 2002).

³² Bachrach, *History of the Alans*.

³³ Hydatius, n. 48, a. 410; R. W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana. Two contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford, 1993); S. Muhlberger, *The Fifth-Century Chroniclers. Prosper, Hydatius, and the Gallic Chronicler of 452*, ARCA. Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs (Leeds, 1990).

³⁴ Hydatius, n. 49, a. 411; J. Arce, 'The enigmatic fifth century', in H.-W. Goetz, J. Jarnut and W. Pohl with S. Kaschke (eds), *Regna and Gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World. The Transformation of the Roman World*, 13 (Leiden/Boston/Cologne, 2003), pp. 135–60.

³⁵ Hydatius, n. 60, a. 416; n. 63, a. 417; n. 68, a. 418; Oros., *Hist.*, VII.43.

GEISERIC AND AFRICA

Geiseric was one of Godegisel's younger sons and Guntheric's half-brother; his mother was a serf, perhaps a Roman. Jordanes provided an impressive description of him:

He was of medium build and walked with a limp due to a fall from his horse; he was of spiritual profundity, taciturn, scorned luxury, was of violent temperament, extraordinarily resourceful and far-sighted, and prepared to sow the seeds of discord and to spread hatred in order to stir the peoples up against one another.³⁶

Geiseric was one of the most successful, and longest-living, of all the rulers of the turbulent fifth century, during which so few enjoyed a long reign.

Geiseric's first great achievement as king was the crossing of the Vandals and Alans to Africa. The Suebi, who had repeatedly been at odds with the Vandals, stayed behind in Spain, where their kingdom in the mountains of Galicia held its own until late in the sixth century. The Visigoths had planned similar voyages to Africa from Italy and Spain before Geiseric's undertaking, but neither had been successful. In May 429, the people and army led by Geiseric crossed the Straits of Gibraltar. Besides Vandals and Alans, Goths and other barbarians are believed to have taken part in the migration. Victor of Vita tells that before they set off, Geiseric had a count taken of the entire assembly, men, both young and old, women, children, soldiers and slaves. In all, they numbered 80 000 – Victor adds that this figure represented the total number of people, not of warriors, as some believed.³⁷ Procopius obviously relied on those informants whose opinion Victor dismisses, since he reports that Geiseric had divided the Vandals and Alans into 80 units of 1000, each under its own commander. He adds, however, that they were formerly believed to have numbered only 50 000.³⁸ In the context of so many fantastic numerical estimates of contemporary chroniclers, 50 000 to 80 000 seems fairly credible.³⁹ Victor was concerned with emphasizing the low number of Vandals and so his estimate can hardly be taken to be too high. According to Wolfram's reckoning, up to 30 000 men fought on each side in the largest battles of the time, one barbarian people containing at most between 15 000 and 20 000 warriors.⁴⁰ The strength of the Roman troops in Africa may be calculated to about 23 000 men.⁴¹

³⁶ Jordanes, *Getica*, XXXIII, 168: '*statura mediocris et equi casu claudicans, animo profundus, sermone rarus, luxoriae contemptor, ira turbidus, habendi cupidus, ad sollicitandas gentes providentissimus, semina contentionum iacere, odia miscere paratus*'.

³⁷ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.2.

³⁸ Procopius, *BV.*, I.5.18ff.

³⁹ For a different opinion, cf. W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans. A. D. 418–584. The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 231–35, who prefers much smaller numbers.

⁴⁰ Wolfram, *Reich und die Germanen*, p. 28.

⁴¹ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, '*Gens into Regnum: the Vandals*', in Goetz et al., *Regna and Gentes*, p. 67.

The number of Vandal invaders cannot have been dramatically inferior. Hydatius also emphasizes that the Vandals went to Africa with their families and followers, making a total number of 80 000 seem not too exaggerated.⁴² After going ashore they swept along the coast westward to Hippo Regius/Bône, which they went on to besiege for some time. This was the episcopal see of Saint Augustine, whose letters, sermons and writings were even then already of great influence. Here, thousands of refugees were gathered beneath the protection of the *Comes Africae* Bonifatius, some having only been able to escape with their bare lives. Augustine wrote to the African bishops, counselling that they should stand by their flocks and offer them spiritual solace.⁴³ He died in August 430, just before the city fell into the hands of the Vandals.

Roman rule in North Africa, organized within the Diocese of Africa, controlled the coast and a wide strip of the hinterland all the way into the Atlas Mountains, where the Berber communities lived (named *Maurusii* or Moors by the Romans). The centre of the region was the province Africa Proconsularia, which covered roughly the northern part of modern-day Tunisia, with its capital Carthage being the most important western metropolis after Rome, with an estimated population of 200 000 inhabitants.⁴⁴ The region's grain-surplus was exported to Rome from here. It may seem surprising given current circumstances that North Africa, *quasi anima rei publicae*,⁴⁵ was the granary of the empire; the provision of the city of Rome was heavily dependant upon African grain supplies. Other than this, exported goods from this fruitful country were wine, oil, and the – very popular in Italy – Red-glazed pottery, the so-called ARS (African Red Slip ware), which today's archaeologists hold to be an important clue to the gradual collapse of the Mediterranean long-distance trade in the fifth to seventh centuries.⁴⁶ The Africa presented in Augustine's letters certainly appears as a society full of contradictions. The richest land-owners possessed an independent position of power and were less involved in imperial administration than in other parts of the Empire. The bishops, on the other hand, relied upon imperial authority in matters of internal disputes within the Church. The troops of the *Comes Africae* were an alien element in a society in which they sought, through exploitation of their position, to become wealthy quickly.⁴⁷

That Geiseric wanted to occupy this region begs no further explanation. As is to be expected, contemporaries asked themselves how he had been able to conquer it at all. Shortly beforehand there had been a conflict between Bonifatius, the *Comes Africae*, and the imperial headquarters. Bonifatius was one of the generals who, at

⁴² Hydatius, n. 90, a. 429.

⁴³ P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography* (London, 1967), pp. 424ff.

⁴⁴ C. Lepelley, *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire*. 2 vols (Paris, 1979–81).

⁴⁵ Salvian, *De gub. Dei*, VI.68.

⁴⁶ An excellent overview is provided by C. Wickham, *Land and Power. Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London, 1994), pp. 77–98; see also the brief bibliography in the introduction to the present volume.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 419ff.

the head of loyal and predominantly barbaric troops, sought to determine the imperial politics of the West, thereby running into conflict with Aetius, which eventually drove him to open rebellion against the emperor; armed disputes could only be avoided with great restraint. Was it Bonifatius who had called the Vandals to Africa as his allies, as Procopius thought?⁴⁸ The crossing of the Vandals into Africa, however, was more in the interests of Aetius.⁴⁹ Bonifatius led, as well as he could, the defence against the invaders, but with little success. In 435 the Western Emperor was forced to conclude a treaty conceding a part of the African diocese to the invaders. In October 439 Geiseric took Carthage in a surprise coup; Prosper states that no-one had expected an attack from the Vandal federates. The sermons of Quodvultdeus paint a dark picture of the Vandal plunderers.⁵⁰ The conquest of Carthage marked an epochal year for the Vandal kingdom.⁵¹ In 442, the status quo was once more recognized in a treaty by the Emperor Valentinian III. A few years later the emperor Valentinian III betrothed his daughter Eudocia to Huneric, Geiseric's son, although the wedding did not take place.

With the acquisition of Carthage, Geiseric now possessed a key position on the Mediterranean, whence Rome had been threatened once already under Hannibal. Geiseric quickly had at his disposal a fleet with which he strove for naval supremacy across broad sections of the Mediterranean. The Vandals occupied Sardinia, Corsica, Sicily and the Balearic Islands and repeatedly pillaged the coasts of southern Italy and Greece. Discovered in 2001, the excavated fleet of cargo-ships which had been burnt in the harbour of Olbia is perhaps a remnant of the Vandal battles. In 455 the Vandals could not be prevented from plundering Rome for two weeks: a more thorough assault than that of Alaric's Goths. The pretext for the surprise attack was the murder of Valentinian III, the last emperor of the Theodosian Dynasty. Shortly beforehand he had murdered the too-powerful Aetius and soon fell victim to revenge. Huneric could finally marry Eudocia, who conferred the prestige of the ousted Theodosian dynasty on Geiseric's family. So Geiseric's intervention was closely connected with dynastic politics in Rome, was perhaps not unwelcome amongst the Theodosian party, and led directly to the overthrow and death of the new emperor.⁵² Nevertheless Rome was humiliated once again. From then on, it was the Eastern Empire which posed the greatest threat to the Vandals. In 468, the Eastern Emperor Leo sent a huge and costly fleet of over 1000 ships out from Constantinople to conquer Africa. However, the old king Geiseric succeeded, with the help of favourable winds and a surprise attack, in

⁴⁸ Procopius, *BV.*, I, 3; for the events: E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (Paris/Brussels/Amsterdam, 1956 [1949]), vol. 1, pp. 317ff.

⁴⁹ R. W. Mathisen, 'Sigisvult the Patrician, Maximinus the Arian, and political stratagems in the Western Roman Empire c. 425-50', *Early Medieval Europe*, 8 (1999), pp. 173-96.

⁵⁰ Courcelle, *Historie littéraire*, pp. 129-39.

⁵¹ F. M. Clover, 'L'année de Carthage et les débuts du monnayage vandale', *Histoire et archéologie de l'Afrique du Nord. Actes du IVe Colloque Internationale. Tome I: Carthage et son territoire dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1990), pp. 215-20.

⁵² Stein, *Bas-Empire*, vol. 1, pp. 365ff.

destroying the fleet by fire while it was under anchor near Cape Bone. In 474 Leo's successor, Zeno, closed an agreement of 'eternal peace' which was honoured for almost 60 years. Rome's decision not to attempt a reconquest of the wealthy Africa was to seal the fate of the Western Empire.⁵³

For a long time the only military threat to which the Vandals were exposed came from the expansion of the Berber peoples, who were beginning to form regional realms of their own. Although Moors also fought within the Vandal armies, as happened during the plundering of Rome, the semi-nomadic Berbers with their camels in the barren valleys of the Atlas Mountains and the surrounding areas of desert were better suited to the prevailing conditions. Their advance marks the start of a lengthy decline of the areas used for agriculture. Nevertheless their centres were Roman towns, sometimes in proximity to the coast. An inscription of the Berber King Masuna has been preserved in Atlava and reads: '*rex gentium Maurorum et Romanorum*'; the example set by the Vandal King's title is as remarkable as the integration of the Romans, who were considered as an ordinary people – *gens* – among others.⁵⁴ Just like the Goths or the Vandals, the Berbers established their realms according to Roman tradition; Procopius claims that no Moor could become king without receiving the insignia of his power from Rome, even if he was waging war against the Romans at the time.⁵⁵ Under Geiseric's successors Vandal control was pushed back ever further to the heartlands of Roman Africa.

THE VANDALS AFTER GEISERIC

Geiseric died in January 477, having ruled the Vandals for almost half a century, and almost 70 years after he had crossed the Rhine, following the death of his father. His eldest son Huneric, who now came into power, was already over 50 years old. In order to prevent a quarrel over the right to the throne among his sons and descendants, Geiseric had left behind a clear stipulation of the line of succession: with each succession, the eldest amongst his sons and descendants should assume rulership. This model of succession excluded, as a rule, the king's sons and gave precedence to his brothers, nephews, or other older male relatives.⁵⁶ This system functioned for a time, notwithstanding the attempts of ruling kings to rid themselves

⁵³ cf. Heather, 'The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire', pp. 4–41.

⁵⁴ H. Wolfram, *Intitulatio I. Lateinische Königs- und Fürstentitel bis zum Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts*, *MIÖG*, suppl., 21 (Cologne/Vienna, 1967), p. 82.

⁵⁵ Procopius, *BV.*, I.25.5.

⁵⁶ I. Wood, 'Royal Succession and Legitimation in the Successor States of the 5th and Early 6th Centuries', in S. Airlie, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds), *Staat im Früh- und Hochmittelalter* (Vienna, forthcoming), who argues against a traditional Germanic model of 'tanistry' and for the experimental character of Geiseric's succession model. See also D. Claude, 'Probleme der vandalischen Herrschaftsnachfolge', *Deutsches Archiv*, 30 (1974) pp. 329–55.

of undesirable relatives. After Huneric's death in 484 came his two nephews, Gunthamund (484–96) and Thrasamund (496–523), then Huneric's son Hilderic, similarly well advanced in years at the time of his accession. Yet the more the genealogy of Geiseric's successors branched out, the more material for conflict built up. In 530 Gelimer, a great grandson of Geiseric from the opposite blood-line to Hilderic, rose up against him, which finally gave Byzantium a pretext to attack.

Significantly, the entitlement of Geiseric's Hasding dynasty to the Vandal kingdom remained largely unchallenged. The prestige of the founder of the kingdom also allowed for the integration of the – originally highly fragmented – band of conquerors. At any rate, the regnal title, *rex Vandalorum et Alanorum*, employed repeatedly by Huneric and Gelimer, included the Alans as a second regnal people.⁵⁷ On the other hand, reports Procopius, all other peoples of the kingdom became submerged 'in the name of the Vandals'.⁵⁸ The role of the Alans in the Vandal kingdom has long been a controversial subject of research - did they retain their own identity, or were they completely Germanized? The title (which was still attested under the last king Gelimer) refers to the political role of Alan identity. Other examples verify that minority groups (for instance the *Rugi* in the Ostrogothic kingdom) could also retain their identity under kings of different extraction. The culture of the 'Gothic peoples' was already, in many respects, rather homogeneous at the beginning of their migration, and adjusted gradually to the Roman setting in Africa. Little can be said about language since, apart from the most traditional proper names, evidence of Vandal or Alanic language has not been preserved.

Africa's wealth had made it possible to provide comfortably for the leading groups among the conquerors. The Vandal warriors had obviously received some of the dispossessed property of previous large-scale Roman landowners as tax-free *sortes Vandalorum*, whilst Geiseric reserved estates in particular provinces for himself and his family.⁵⁹ The Vandals' new existence as land-owners in what was essentially a functioning late Roman society, led quickly, despite tensions, to their extensive Romanization and acculturation.⁶⁰ Vandal identity, which gave them access to privileges, was certainly preserved and probably also adopted by some members of the native ruling classes.

Even if the Vandal occupation of the country brought great losses to the leading strata of Roman Africa, the complaints of Victor of Vita and Procopius that the Romans had fallen into poverty and slavery are tendentiously exaggerated. The

⁵⁷ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.39; III.3; Wolfram, *Intitulatio*, 79ff.

⁵⁸ Procopius, *BV.*, I.5.21.

⁵⁹ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.13; Procopius, *BV.*, I.5.12–15. Even Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, p. 36, who assumes accommodation of barbarians through tax benefits in all other cases, concedes that the Vandals expropriated Roman proprietors. Liebeschuetz, 'Gens into Regnum', p. 69.

⁶⁰ F. M. Clover, 'The Symbiosis of Romans and Vandals in Africa', in E. Chrysos and A. Schwarcz (eds), *Das Reich und die Barbaren*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, 29 (Cologne/Vienna, 1989), pp. 57–73.

municipal system of the cities seems largely to have continued to function uninterrupted. Romans could also attain the highest social positions, as is illustrated by the careers of the poets Luxorius, Dracontius and Felix.⁶¹ That many Romans were able to remain in charge of their landholdings is verified by the Albertini tablets, which, preserved in the desert climate, provide records of day-to-day legal transactions.⁶² Geiseric is even believed to have burned the tax-register, which must have at least provided temporary relief for the remaining Roman upper classes. Otherwise, the Roman tax system continued, and Huneric later raised the taxes once again.⁶³ The property of the Church does not seem to have been seriously affected by the settlement of the Vandals. Extensive excavations in Carthage have, in many respects, conjured a picture of late antique decline as elsewhere, but offer no indication of a break in the urban development in the Vandal era.⁶⁴ It seems that large parts of the population, among which the regime of estate-owners and the Roman military had not been too popular anyway, soon came to terms with Vandal rule. It was not such a giant step from the contemporary Christian belief that the Vandals were sent from God as punishment for the Christians' sins (as, for instance, Salvian of Marseille had argued), to a Christian legitimization of the Vandal kingdom.

Outside the kingdom, naval supremacy and control over grain-exports secured Geiseric's successors a strong position. Only Sicily could not be held permanently and fell to the Ostrogoths. Thrasamund married Amalafrida, sister to the Ostrogothic King Theoderic, in around 500, who is said to have come to Carthage with a following of 1000 Gothic warriors and their retinue. Thrasamund hardly supported Theoderic's politics actively, but still the relations between them remained mostly friendly until his death in 523.⁶⁵ His successor Hilderic (who was, of course, from another branch of Geiseric's family), removed the Ostrogothic queen and in the end had her and her followers murdered. Theoderic died before he could carry out the planned revenge attack.

In that part of the Western Empire which was furthest away from Germania emerged the most successful *regnum* so far which warriors of Germanic origin built on Roman soil. The reports about conditions in the kingdom of Geiseric and his successors are, however, more tendentious than elsewhere. The most extensive report from Vandal Africa was written by Victor of Vita, and characteristically carries the title *Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae*. It deals with the persecution of the Church by the Arian Vandal kings. The Church was already marked by religious discord and intolerance when the Vandals arrived, which had

⁶¹ M. Rosenblum, *Luxorius. A Latin Poet among the Vandals* (New York and London, 1961); Clover, 'Symbiosis', pp. 62ff.

⁶² Courtois et al., *Tablettes Albertini*.

⁶³ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.2; cf. Liebeschuetz, 'Gens into Regnum', p. 75.

⁶⁴ A. Ben Abed-Ben Khader and N. Duval, 'Carthage, la capitale du royaume et les villes de Tunisie à l'époque vandale', in G. Ripoll and J. M. Gurt (eds), *Sedes Regiae (ann. 400–800)* (Barcelona, 2000), pp. 163–218.

⁶⁵ Wolfram, *Goten*.

been vented in the fourth century in the so-called Donatist dispute. Theological debates often led to the outbreak of political disputes in late Antiquity, in which violent mobs were easily mobilized.

Initially, the confessional division between Arians and Catholics more or less corresponded to the ethnic separation of the Vandals from the Romans. The conflict came to a head when Geiseric, and above all his successor Huneric, began to cut back the influence of the Catholic Church.⁶⁶ Propagating Arian confession among loyal Roman subjects seemed to offer the chance for broadening the basis of Vandal rule and integrate at least part of the leading strata of the Romans. First, Geiseric demanded the acceptance of Arian confession as a prerequisite for all court offices; then individual bishops were dismissed or driven out, and Churches or church property handed over to the Arians. Victor claims that Huneric finally ordered the closure of all Catholic churches and forbade all Catholic liturgy, forcing thousands of Catholic priests and bishops into exile.⁶⁷ This may of course be an exaggeration coming from the Catholic apologist. In any case, the Vandal king could use those laws to his advantage, which had been issued to suppress heretics under the Roman Empire. Both of Huneric's decrees, which Victor of Vita quotes, represent cutting-edge rhetoric for confessional disputes of the time. The methods of persecution, alternating between repression and attempts to convince, were in no way different to those used in the empire. The only difference was that the Roman Church was the victim in this case. In the African Church, with its strong, independent currents, this was bound to have some success. Victor expressly criticized those Romans who 'loved and sometimes praised' the barbarians.⁶⁸ Roman consensus and not only persecution was his concern. Thus, he endeavoured not only to denounce the injustice of religious persecution, but also to insist on the barbarism of the persecutors, trying to redraw the blurring line between Vandals and Romans. This hardly corresponded to the realities of his day, but was the deciding factor for the later image of the Vandals.⁶⁹

In many respects, Hilderic's accession to rule in 523 marked a more open policy toward the Catholic Church and Byzantium, which provoked opposition among leading groups of the Vandals. In 530 Hilderic was overthrown and imprisoned by Gelimer. Emperor Justinian, referring to the contract of 474, used this breach in the rules of succession to Geiseric's throne as a pretext to attack. He promised the fall of the tyrant to the Vandals, and to the 'Lybians' (the name given in Byzantium to the inhabitants of Northern Africa) 'who were Romans from time immemorial', liberation from the Vandals.⁷⁰ After Gelimer had refused the Byzantine demand for the extradition of Huneric, a fleet bound for Africa was prepared in Constantinople

⁶⁶ Courcelle, *Historie littéraire*, pp. 183–99; Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 289ff.

⁶⁷ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.2–20; Vict. Tun., a. 479 (who speaks of 4000 exiles); see also Gregory of Tours' legendary accounts, Greg. Tur., *LH.*, II.3.

⁶⁸ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.62.

⁶⁹ See the study by Roland Steinacher in Chapter 8 of the present volume.

⁷⁰ Procopius, *BV.*, I.16.

under the command of Belisarius. It was equipped with 5000 mounted warriors, and 10 000 foot-soldiers, together with Belisarius' personal guard. Procopius, who accompanied Belisarius, left behind a comprehensive eye-witness account. Belisarius is reported to have said: 'Ever since the conquest of Africa, the Vandals have seen no other enemy apart from naked Moors', in order to encourage his numerically inferior soldiers.⁷¹

The unsuspecting Gelimer had dispatched his brother Tzazo to suppress an uprising in Sardinia; now, with all speed, he summoned the remaining Vandal warriors to hold off the advance of the Byzantines to the south of Carthage. However, the few experienced fighters amongst the Vandals were poorly organized and indecisive and were beaten into retreat, in spite of their superiority in numbers. Belisarius was now able to occupy Carthage without even a fight, where he immediately ordered the dilapidated defences to be repaired. In the meantime Gelimer regrouped his army and waited for the return of Tzazo. In December 533 the decisive battle was fought at Tricamarum. When Tzazo fell, the Vandals retreated to camp. Procopius claims that the Byzantines only lost 50 men, while the Vandals mourned the loss of 800; this was sufficient to destroy the Vandal kingdom. Gelimer fled, at which the other warriors also abandoned their women, children, and belongings. In his further advance, Belisarius was met everywhere with the same picture: Vandals seeking asylum in the churches. They were disarmed and sent off to Constantinople. Gelimer had entrenched himself in an inaccessible fort in the Atlas Mountains, but capitulated in the end, to receive an honourable exile in Asia Minor. The Vandal royal treasure fell into Belisarius' hands at Hippo, before it could safely be removed to Spain. Even the Byzantines were astounded by the riches that had been accumulated by the Vandals.

The upper strata of Vandal society lived in luxury and were, according to Procopius, no longer a match for the hardships of war against Justinian's army:

When the Vandals had conquered Africa, they visited the baths daily, rejoiced in the pleasures of a richly laid table, and ate the best, the sweetest which the sea and the land brought forth. They wore gold and clothed themselves in silk garments, spent their time at theatre performances and animal-baiting and other such pleasant distractions, but above all hunting. And they had dancers and actors and musicians who they listened to. The majority of them lived in splendid parks, which were well-stocked with water and trees. They had a great number of banquets and rejoiced in all types of sexual pleasures.⁷²

That was the lifestyle of the Roman elite, of which the moralizing critics of Antiquity had repeatedly disapproved. If barbarians, too, could live like this, moreover, it must have seemed a distorted world to the educated Roman. Procopius emphasized the point that the true barbarians were the Moors, who still lived under the most basic conditions. Thus they were the more unpleasant enemies faced by the Byzantines, and many put up resistance against the Byzantine regime.

⁷¹ Procopius, *BV.*, I.19.7.

⁷² Procopius, *BV.*, II. 6.5-9.

On this basis, nineteenth-century historiography identified the decadence and loss of Germanic virtues as the reason for the decline and fall of the Vandals. This moralizing judgement touched upon a nationalistic interpretation of the critique of civilization in ancient times. It deemed those virtues, which the authors of Antiquity generally attributed to the simple life of the barbarians, as the expression of a specifically Germanic mindset, the loss of which would prove to be fatal. Today one would be less inclined to assume that a society is under threat because the members of its elites visit the baths daily, go to the theatre and enjoy sexual pleasures. The Greco-Roman world had successfully lived like this for a millennium. The factual basis of the moralizing perceptions may be found in the observation that in late Antiquity those who, for various reasons, had nothing to lose, challenged this ancient, civilized world in great numbers. In the middle of the sixth century, Procopius was keen to reassure his readers with the observation that the good life in the Roman provinces reduced the initial superiority of the barbarians in the end to nothing. Nevertheless, it would not be long before the theatre, baths and the ancient lifestyle in general would disappear.

While the history of the Vandals came to an end in 533–34, the history of the group's name had a varied future. Christian communities in Europe handed down Victor of Vita's history and portrayed the Vandals as pagan or heretic plunderers. When Gregory of Catino wrote the history of his monastery of Farfa in the eleventh century, he reasoned that the Longobards, later benefactors of his monastery, could not have destroyed Farfa in the sixth century, and that the Vandals must have been responsible. French churches preserved or invented miraculous stories of the Vandal invasions in Gaul. Even at the Irschenberg in Bavaria a Vandal attack was claimed to have taken place.⁷³ In the latter case, the identification of the Vandals with the Vinedi (the German term for the Slavs) was already having effect, which became very diffused in the Middle Ages. In Scandinavia, the equation of the Vandals with the Winnili (as the ancestors of the Longobards had been called) led to the construction of their supposed Nordic origins, and sometimes from this was derived a right of rule over the Slavic, 'Vinedic', regions to the south of the Baltic. Thus in early modern Swedish royal titles, the Vandals can be found alongside Swedes and Goths.⁷⁴ Other similarities between names were also to be found. Carolingian scholars in St Gall identified the Vandals with the pre-Roman Vindelici, the Suebi with the Swabians and the Alans with the Alemanni, and thus derived their ancestry from the Vandal migration, which, however, did not become popular. The Vandals were even identified with the Bavarians in one glossary.⁷⁵

⁷³ O. Holder-Egger, 'Über die Heiligen Marinus und Annianus', *Neues Archiv*, 13 (1888), pp. 22–8.

⁷⁴ J. Svennung, *Zur Geschichte des Goticismus* (Uppsala, 1967).

⁷⁵ W. Pohl, 'Das awarische Khaganat und die anderen Gentes im Karpatenbecken (6.–8.Jh.)', in B. Hänsel (ed.), *Die Völker Südosteuropas im 6. bis 8. Jahrhundert*, *Südosteuropa-Jahrbuch*, 17 (1987), pp. 41–52.

In France, a negative image of the Vandals as plunderers and destroyers of culture has been fixed since the humanists. In the controversy surrounding the French revolution, the term 'vandalism' could thus become a touchstone. Henri-Baptiste Gregoire, the Bishop of Blois, used the term for the first time in 1794 in a dispute with the revolutionaries, whom he not least accused of the destruction of the churches and their treasures of art. The term was quickly transferred from his reports to the convent into political discussion and was later incorporated into daily use.⁷⁶ The short history of the Vandals, but above all their migration from Central Europe to North Africa, has left a lasting impression on the European consciousness. However, the modern image of the Vandals does not arise directly from historical experience, but was subsequently, through many roundabout ways, charged with meaning and emotive connotations.

⁷⁶ cf. A. Demandt, *Vandalismus. Gewalt gegen Kultur* (Berlin, 1997).

Chapter 2

The Settlement of the Vandals in North Africa

Andreas Schwarcz

In the summer of 451 the emperor Valentinian III issued an order to the praetorian prefect Firminus to provide the exiled and dispossessed dignitaries of Proconsularis and Byzacena with landed estates in Mauretania Caesariensis and Sitifensis.¹ This administrative measure for fugitives from the realm of the Vandals shaped the traditional view of the way in which the settlement of the Vandals in North Africa was organized by their king, Geiseric. Ludwig Schmidt postulated that the Vandals were a notable exception from the model of settlement then prevalent, namely the ordered settlement on the basis of *hospitalitas*: the Roman system of temporary quartering of soldiers in private houses according to the provisions of C.Th. VII, 8,5 from 398 AD, formulated in 1844 by Karl Theodor Gaupp,² and later called by Ferdinand Lot 'la regime du hospitalité'.³ Schmidt saw the basis of the Vandal settlement in massive expropriations: a regular dividing up of the private estates by land measurement with the rope and distribution of this land to the military units of the *millenae* in the province of Africa Proconsularis. The land meted out to the Vandals was freed from the obligation to pay taxes and these were the *sortes Vandalorum* noted by Victor of Vita and Procopius.⁴ Schmidt's view was shared by Christian Courtois⁵ and Hans-Joachim Diesner.⁶ The general picture of Germanic settlement in the fifth century was challenged by Walter Goffart in 1980,⁷ who questioned the system of *hospitalitas* as basis for a division of land and postulated a system of tax allotments as basis for the regular payment of *annonae* to the federate

¹ Nov. Val. 34, (451 AD).

² E. T. Gaupp, *Die Germanischen Ansiedlungen und Landtheilungen in den Provinzen des Römischen Westreiches in ihrer völkerrechtlichen Eigenthümlichkeit und mit Rücksicht auf verwandte Erscheinungen der alten Welt und des späteren Mittelalters dargestellt* (Breslau, 1844), p. 198.

³ F. Lot, 'Du régime de l'hospitalité', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 7(1928), pp. 975–1011.

⁴ L. Schmidt, *Die Vandalen* (Dresden, 1901, repr. 1942), p. 73. Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.39, and III, 4. Procopius, *BV.*, I, 5, 12ff.

⁵ Courtois, *Les Vandales*.

⁶ H.-J. Diesner, *Der Untergang der römischen Herrschaft in Nordafrika* (Weimar, 1964), p. 190ff, *Das Vandalenreich Aufstieg und Untergang* (Stuttgart, 1966), p. 58.

⁷ W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans AD. 418–584. The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, NJ, 1980).

armies in Italy and Gaul. Goffart, however, did not allot a special chapter in his study on barbarian settlement to the Vandals. In his view, they were settled on the basis of 'arbitrary expropriations by which Geiseric provided for the Vandals in North Africa'.⁸ In two footnotes he implied a similarity of the allotments of Geiseric to the system used in Italy and Gaul.⁹ Jean Durliat, on the other hand, followed suit in two articles and a few years later pleaded at the 1986 Zwettl workshop on integration for the application of Goffart's model to the Vandals, and for a fiscal interpretation of the *sortes Vandalorum*.¹⁰ Herwig Wolfram followed Durliat in his chapter on the Vandals in *Das Reich und die Germanen*, allotting to the federates a share of the taxes collected by the curiales after the treaty of 435.¹¹ Durliat's point of view was massively criticized by Wolf Liebeschütz and Evangelos Chrysos in a debate published by the 'Transformation of the Roman World' Project¹² and this critique was taken up and confirmed by Yves Modéran most recently in *Antiquité tardive*.¹³ Modéran stresses once again the expropriations and allotments of land by Geiseric after 439 as the basis of the territorial settlement of the Vandals, the scattering of Vandal families in the African countryside and the practical independence of the Vandal realm.

But what our sources actually tell us remains elusive and difficult to interpret. According to Hydatius, Geiseric crossed the Strait of Gibraltar in May 429. Just before the crossing he had beaten back an attack of the Sueves against the province of Baetica, pursued them into Lusitania and defeated their leader Heremigarius near Emerita. His adversary had drowned in flight in the river Guadiana.¹⁴ He took all the Vandals and their families with him to Africa – at least that is what Hydatius tells us – and Victor of Vita numbers them at 80 000.¹⁵ But numbers are always suspect in late Antiquity, and Goffart provides a lot of evidence for the literary usage of this

⁸ Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, p. 36.

⁹ Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, p. 68, n. 20, p. 212, n. 15.

¹⁰ J. Durliat, 'Les grands propriétaires africains et l'État byzantin', *Cahiers de Tunisie*, 29 (1981) p. 519, n. 8, 'Les finances municipales africaines de Constantin aux Aghlabides', *BCTH*, n.s. 19B (1985) p. 383, 'Le salaire de la paix', in H. Wolfram and A. Schwarcz (eds), *Anerkennung und Integration. Zu den wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen der Völkerwanderungszeit 400–600. Berichte des Symposions der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung 7. bis 9. Mai 1986. Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung*, 11 (Vienna, 1988), pp. 21–72, esp. pp. 40–45.

¹¹ H. Wolfram, *Das Reich und die Germanen* (Vienna, 1994), p. 239.

¹² Compare J. H. W. G. Liebeschütz, 'Cities, taxes, and the accommodation of the barbarians: The theories of Durliat and Goffart', in W. Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire. The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity*, Transformation of the Roman World, 1 (Leiden/New York/Cologne, 1997), pp. 135–51, and, in the same volume, J. Durliat, 'Cité, impôt et intégration des barbares', pp. 153–79 and E. Chrysos, 'De foederatis iterum', pp. 185–206.

¹³ Y. Modéran, 'L'établissement territorial des Vandales en Afrique'.

¹⁴ Hydatius, a.429.

¹⁵ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.2.

number.¹⁶ Moreover, according to Possidius, Geiseric's army consisted of Vandals and Alans, but also of a strong group of Goths.¹⁷

This brings us to another perennial point of debate: the relations between the *Comes Africae*, Bonifatius, and the invading Vandals. According to Procopius and Jordanes, Bonifatius had concluded a treaty with the Vandal kings Gunderic and Geiseric to divide Africa between the three of them in order to get their support against the court of Ravenna, which had deposed and recalled him, and against whom he was in rebellion in 427 and 428. Consequently, he invited the Vandals to Africa.¹⁸ De Lepper, Schmidt, Courtois and Clover have all argued persuasively against this late conjuration theory, yet it keeps cropping up.¹⁹ The strongest argument against it is the silence of the contemporary sources. Prosper, for example, keeps in his account the federates of Bonifatius and the Vandals clearly apart:

Due to the decision of Felix, war was waged against Boniface in the name of the state by the generals Mavortius, Gallio, and Sanoeces. Boniface's power and fame were growing in Africa and he had refused to come to Italy. The generals besieging Boniface were killed, betrayed by Sanoeces, and soon he who had betrayed them was himself killed. Thereafter access to the sea was gained by peoples who were unacquainted with ships until they were called in by rival sides to give assistance. The conduct of the war undertaken against Boniface was transferred to Count Sigisvult.

The Vandal people crossed from Spain to Africa.²⁰

Clover has shown that Bonifatius' federates were Goths, because Possidius speaks of 'Bonifacius cum Gothorum foederatorum exercitu', who defended Hippo Regius during the 14-month siege by the Vandals.²¹ I do not, however, follow his suggestion that these were the followers of Sanoeces. We must remember that Bonifatius married a woman of Arian faith in this period, and even had his daughter baptized by an Arian priest. His wife Pelagia later married Aetius after the death of her first husband and the poet Merobaudes called her 'heroum suboles, propago regum'.²² She was a Gothic princess according to the testimony of Sidonius Apollinaris: 'nato quae regna parabo exclusa sceptris Geticis?',²³ and was possibly

¹⁶ Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, p. 231 ff.

¹⁷ Possidius, *VA.*, 28: ... *immanium hostium Vandalorum et Alanorum commixtam secum habens Gothorum gentem*...

¹⁸ Procopius, *BV.*, I.3.23-26; Jordanes, *Getica*, XXIII, 167-169.

¹⁹ cf. F. M. Clover, 'Geiseric, the Statesman' (unpubl. PhD, Chicago 1966), pp. 18-31; Wolfram, *Reich und Germanen*, p. 236.

²⁰ Prosper, *Chron.*, n.1294-5, s.a. 427: *Bonifatius, cuius intra Africam potentia gloriaque augebatur, bellum ad arbitrium felicitis, quia ad Italiam venire abnuerat, publico nomine inlatum est ducibus Mavortio et Gallione et Sanoece. Qui obsidentes bonifatium prodente Sanoece occisi sunt, mox etiam qui prodiderat interfecto. Exinde gentibus, quae uti navibus nesciant, mare pervium factum est bellique contra Bonifatium coepta in Segisvultum comitem cura translata est. Gens Wandalorum ab Hispania ad Africam transit.* (tr. A. C. Murray).

²¹ Possidius, *VA.*, 28.

²² Merobaudes, *Carmina*, F. Vollmer (ed.), MGH, AA, 14.1 (Berlin, 1905), IV.17; cf. *PLRE* II, p. 856ff.

²³ Sid. Apoll., *Carm.*, V.203ff.

a daughter of a predecessor of Theodoric I, who was then ruling the Visigoths. Her entourage would have balanced the forces of the *Comes Sigisvultus* – himself a Goth to judge from his name. Theodoric may already have been an ally of Geiseric. The unknown Gothic princess married to Huneric could have provided the traditional bond to confirm an alliance between two ruling families, to secure the rear of the Vandals during their invasion into Africa and to ensure Gothic cooperation in the project.²⁴ The involvement of different groups of Goths on both sides – perhaps the followers of rival dynastic lines – is another argument against a possible conjunction between Bonifatius and Geiseric, and, what is more, there is not the slightest indication of even a passing accord between them. The Vandals had already pillaged the coast of Mauretania under the reign of Gunderic. They knew that a civil war was raging in the African provinces, which seems only to have been concluded by a reconciliation between the empress Galla Placidia and Bonifatius at the end of 428, and took advantage of this fact.

After passing over from Iulia Traducta to Tingitana, it took the Vandals a year to reach Hippo Regius over the pass of Taza. They destroyed Altava in the second half of August 429 and plundered Tassacora, Portus Magnus, Cartenna, Caesarea, Icosium, Auzia, Sitifis, Cirta, Calama, Thagaste, Sicca and Thuburbo Major.²⁵ Marauders even reached the Byzacena. Only three cities withstood the onslaught, Cirta, Carthage and Hippo Regius,²⁶ where the Vandals had to raise their siege after 14 months. A year later the city fell to them anyway.

The war lasted until 435. In 431 the troops of the Eastern Empire intervened under the command of Aspar, who celebrated his consulate at Carthage in 434, but who was also beaten by Geiseric. Bonifatius was recalled to Ravenna in 432 and fell in battle against his rival Aetius shortly afterwards. Prosper gives us news of a peace treaty concluded at Hippo on 11 February 435 between Geiseric and Trygetius, a high official of the Western Empire:

Peace made with the Vandals by Trigetius at Hippo on 11 February. The Vandals were given a part of Africa to live in.²⁷

Procopius gives us some further details of the treaty, but conflates the treaties of 435 and 442 into a single agreement.²⁸ Modern historians generally agree that Huneric was given as a hostage to the Romans only in 442, and that the annual tributes conceded by Geiseric to the empire also involved the continuation of the traditional supply of African grain to Italy from the provinces now controlled by the Vandals.

²⁴ cf. Wolfram, *Reich und Germanen*, p. 236. A. Schwarcz, 'Nachrichten über den lateinischen Westen bei Prokopius von Caesarea' (unpubl. Hausarbeit, Vienna, 1983), pp. 20–22.

²⁵ Schmidt, *Die Wandalen*, p. 60ff.

²⁶ Possidius, *VA.*, 28.

²⁷ Prosper, *Chron.*, n.1321, s.a. 435: *Pax facta cum Vandalis data eis habitandum Africae portione (per Trigetium in loco Hippone III idus Febr.)*. (tr. A. C. Murray).

²⁸ Procopius, *BV.*, I.4.12–14.

The territory controlled by the Vandals may be inferred from a further notice given by Prosper for 437:

In Africa, Geiseric, king of the Vandals, wanted to use the Arian impiety to undo the Catholic faith in the regions where he resided. He persecuted some of our bishops, of whom the most famous were Possidius, Novatus, and Severianus, to the extent that he deprived them of their right to the churches and even drove them from their cities, for their steadfastness would not yield to the terrors of that most proud king.²⁹

According to Courtois these three bishops were Possidius of Calama, Novatus of Sitifis and Severianus of Cera.³⁰ Geiseric must thus have controlled the provinces of Mauretania Sitifiensis, Numidia and part of Proconsularis and apparently exerted the rights of a military commander and Roman official to order ecclesiastical affairs. In this phase up to 439, the Vandals were stationed as Roman soldiers in Roman provinces and that is why there is no special information on their settlement or treatment. They were garrisoned in the cities like the soldiers of Bonifatius before them and their official status was that of federates of the empire. They were paid and supplied by the cities of North Africa.

This phase of the Vandal settlement lasted until 439 AD. On 19 October 439 Geiseric took the city of Carthage by surprise and, according to Hydatius, invaded all of Africa still under direct control of Ravenna:

After taking Carthage by a great stratagem on 19 October, King Geiseric invaded all of Africa.³¹

In the following year Geiseric attacked Sicily and laid siege to Palermo.³² Succour came from the East with a fleet of 1100 ships in 441 AD, but turned out to be ineffectual. So Valentinian III concluded another peace with Geiseric in 442:

The Augustus Valentinian made peace with Geiseric and Africa was divided between the two into distinct territories.³³

As part of the stipulations of this treaty Huneric seems to have gone as hostage to Ravenna, at least for some time.

²⁹ Prosper, *Chron.*, n.1327, s.a.437: *In Africa Gisiricus rex Vandalorum, intra habitationes suae limites volens catholicam fidem Arrianae impietate subvertere, quosdam nostros episcopos, quorum Posidius et Novatus ac Severianus clariores erant, eatenus persecutus est, ut eos privatis iure basilicarum suarum etiam civitatibus pelleret, cum ipsorum constantia nullis superbissimi regis terroribus cederet.* (tr. A. C. Murray).

³⁰ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 170 with n. 2.

³¹ Hydatius, n.107 s.a. 439: *Cartagine magna fraude decepta die XIII kl. Nouembris omnem Africam rex Gaisericus inuadit.* (tr. R. W. Burgess).

³² Hydatius, n. 112, s.a. 440.

³³ Prosper, *Chron.*, n.1347 s.a. 442: *Cum Genserico autem ab Valentiniano Augusto pax confirmata, et certis spatiis Africa inter utrumque divisa est.* (tr. A. C. Murray).

This time Victor of Vita is able to shed some light on the *certis spatiis* divided up:

He also made an arrangement concerning the individual provinces: Byzacena, Abaritana and Gaetulia, and part of Numidia he kept for himself; Zeugitana and the proconsular province he divided up as 'an allotted portion for his people'; and he allowed Valentinian, who was till emperor, to take for himself the remaining, and now devastated, provinces. After Valentinian died he gained control of the coastline of all Africa, and with his customary arrogance he also took the large islands of Sardinia, Sicily, Corsica, Ibiza, Mallorca and Menorca, as well as many others.³⁴

According to Courtois, who compares Victor with *Nov. Val.* 13 and 34, the Vandals now controlled parts of Numidia, the Proconsular province, Byzacena and Tripolitanis, whereas the other part of Numidia, Mauretania Caesariensis and Sitifensis belonged to the emperor.³⁵ After the death of Valentinian III these regions and all of the islands in the Western Mediterranean seem to have been occupied by the Vandals.

The capture of Carthage became the starting point for a new era in the Vandal Kingdom; years were calculated from that point onwards. Did the treaty also represent a new pattern of settlement in the form of arbitrary expulsions – as supposed by Schmidt – or through the regular division of Roman lands by right of conquest, as Gaupp argued in 1844?³⁶ Much has been made out of Victor's phrase *funiculo hereditatis*. Gaupp suggested that this signified a regular dividing up of confiscated land. If we may trust John Moorhead's translation of the passage, it is simply a biblical citation (I Chron.16:18), meaning 'an allotted portion for his people'.³⁷ The citation originally is indeed part of the praise for God composed by King David:

And He appointed the same to Jacob for a precept: and to Israel for an everlasting covenant: Saying: To thee will I give the land of Canaan: the lot of your inheritance. When they were but a small number: very few and sojourners in it. And they passed from nation to nation: and from a kingdom to another people.³⁸

'He [that is, God] spoke: I will give unto thee Canaan as an allotted heirloom for thy people.' The traditional interpretation given to this passage cannot be upheld and it

³⁴ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.13: *Disponens quoque singulas quasque provincias sibi Bizacenam, Abaritanam atque Getuliam et partem Numidiae reservavit, exercitui uero Zeugitanam uel proconsularem funiculo hereditatis diuisit, Valentiniano adhuc imperatore reliquas licet iam exterminatas prouincias defendente; post cuius mortem totius Africae ambitum obtinuit nec non et insulas maximas Sardiniam, Siciliam, Corsicam, Ebusum, Maioricam, Minoricam uel alias multas superbia sibi consueta defendit.* (tr. J. Moorhead).

³⁵ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 172–75.

³⁶ E. T. Gaupp, *Ansiedlungen*, pp. 448–53.

³⁷ John Moorhead, *Victor of Vita: History of the Vandal Persecution*, Translated Texts for Historians, 10 (Liverpool, 1992), p. 7.

³⁸ Vulgata I Chron. 16:17-20: *Et constituit illud Jacob in praeceptum: et Israel in pactum sempiternum, Dicens: Tibi dabo terram Chanaan in funiculum hereditatis vestrae, Cum essent pauci in numeri, parvi et coloni eius. Et transierunt de gente in gentem et de regno ad populum alterum.*

does not mean that the province of Africa Proconsularis was divided up by rope and meted out in land allotments and that the main part of the Vandal army was settled there. Victor used this citation to draw a comparison between the settlement of the Chosen People in Canaan and that of the Vandals in Roman Africa and not to give information about the techniques of accommodation of the barbarians. In fact, Victor showed that most of the territory conceded by the *foedus* of 442 went under direct royal control, whereas Africa Proconsularis had to finance the federate army. The division between the king and his army was not a division of land; it simply meant that the income from the Proconsular Province financed the army, and all the other provinces supported the king, his court and his officials.

Of course there were confiscations in the Vandal realm and redistribution of property, but they were not restricted to Africa Proconsularis, as is shown by *Nov. Val.* XXXIV, which also mentions fugitives from Byzacena. There was extortion and plundering, especially in times of war – as happened between 429 and 435 and between 439 and 442. Senators who went into exile lost their possessions. But at least some of those who returned later seem to have recovered at least a portion of their wealth, as the example of the sons of Gordianus, the grandfather of Fulgentius of Ruspe, shows.³⁹ The Catholic communities did not only lose their churches to the Arian clergy, the possessions belonging to the Church went with it to the new incumbents of the bishoprics and cathedrals. And of course there were donations out of confiscated land to the Arian Church and to followers of the king. The family of Fulgentius did not get back their house in Carthage: that had gone to the Arian patriarchs of the city, as shown by Noël Duval.⁴⁰ Of course the soldiers were also allotted land. But in this respect they were treated as Roman soldiers who had a right on hereditary land after a *honesta missio*. And the land brought the hereditary obligation to military service.

There remains the question what to do with the report given by Procopius, who tells us in his *De bello Vandalico* that Geiseric had given the best and richest lands (and their former possessors with them) to his sons and to the Vandal people.⁴¹ According to him these possession were called *sortes Vandalorum* and their owners did not have to pay taxes. In another passage he tells us that Geiseric had ordered the old tax lists to be destroyed.⁴² As with his account of the Vandal invasion, however, Procopius' institutional analysis must also be distrusted. Ludwig Schmidt noted that the old tax lists were supplanted by new ones, because evidently there were taxes collected in the Vandal kingdom.⁴³ Those Vandal lists, of course, were of no use after the Byzantine conquest, because the structure of possessions had changed again.

³⁹ Ferrandus, *VF.*, I.4; cf. Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 300; M. Overbeck, *Untersuchungen zum afrikanischen Senatsadel in der Spätantike*, Frankfurter althistorische Studien, 7 (Frankfurt, 1973), p. 61.

⁴⁰ N. Duval, 'Discussions des communications publiées dans le numero 10', *Antiquité Tardive*, 10 (2002), p. 38.

⁴¹ Procopius, *BV.*, I.5.11–17.

⁴² Procopius, *BV.*, II.8.25.

⁴³ Schmidt, *Die Wandalen*, p. 180.

Justinian had confiscated the former Vandal possessions and given the order to return to claimants the possessions of their parents or grandfathers within five years.⁴⁴

If we take a closer look on the *sortes Vandalorum*, we may arrive at another interpretation. First, we must bear in mind that the application of this term to landed estates is given by Procopius for his own time – the middle of the sixth century – and does not tell us anything of the circumstances of settlement in the first half of the fifth century. The only contemporary use of the term *sortes Vandalorum* is given in two passages of Victor of Vita, where he cites two edicts of Huneric dealing with them.

The first is the official invitation issued on 20 May 483 for the discussion to be held between Catholic and Arian clergy at Carthage on 1 February 484:

Hunirix, king of the Vandals and Alans, to all the homousian bishops. It is well known that not once but quite often your priests have been forbidden to celebrate any liturgies at all in the territory of the Vandals, in case they seduce Christian souls and destroy them.⁴⁵

The Catholic bishops (*sacerdotes*⁴⁶ means ‘bishops’, as shown by Duval) are expressly forbidden to have meetings on Vandal territory. *Sortes Vandalorum* here means simply ‘territory of the Vandals’ or ‘the realm of the Vandals’ as a whole, not the individual holdings of the Vandals.

The same holds true of the second edict issued after the meeting on 25 February 484:

For we had all the peoples notified of our orders that the homousian priests were to presume to hold no liturgies in the lands of the Vandals, nor were they to take it upon themselves to celebrate the mysteries, things which in fact pollute.⁴⁷

The meaning of the passage is the same as in the first example and these are the only two instances where Victor uses this term. *Sortes Vandalorum* simply means ‘Vandal realm’, whenever Victor uses it.

If we sum up our assumptions, we find a development of the Vandal settlement in three stages:

- Phase 1 extends from the invasion of 429 to the treaty of 435. A period of war and plundering is terminated by the orderly process of accommodation of soldiers within a territory defined by a treaty. The Vandals are treated as federates.

⁴⁴ Nov. Just., 36; Gaupp, *Ansiedlungen*, p. 454.

⁴⁵ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.39: *Rex Hunirix Uuandalorum et Alanorum univris episcopis omousianis. Non semel sed saepius constat esse prohibitum, ut in sortibus Uuandalorum sacerdotes vestry conventus minime celebrarent, ne sua seductione animas subverterent Christianas.* (tr. J. Moorhead).

⁴⁶ Duval, ‘Discussions des communications’, p. 38.

⁴⁷ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.4: *Auctoritatibus enim cunctis populis fecimus innotesci, ut in sortibus Uuandalorum nullos conventus omousiani sacerdotes adsumerent, nec aliquid mysteriorum, quae magis polluant, sibimet vindicarent.* (tr. J. Moorhead)

- Phase 2 begins with the conquest of Carthage and another period of war terminated by the peace treaty of 442. The provinces allotted to the Vandals by this treaty are the basis for the financing of the king, his court and his army. Land is also meted out to the soldiers and officials, but the process of allocation is comparable to all other realms of the West in the fifth century. This is the period when the inner structure of the Vandal realm is fixed for good.
- Phase 3 follows the death of Valentinian III. It widens the frontiers of the Vandal realm and enlarges its territory, but there is no change in the pattern of possessions and financing.

All in all, a picture emerges in which the king and his courtiers, the Arian Church and its bishops, the high nobles and functionaries of the realm owned land. The king took over the lands of the fisc and of the patrimonium, from these holdings he donated lands and estates to his family and followers and also redistributed the estates of the Catholic Church and the proscribed Roman possessors. But a broad layer of Roman possessors remained who had to pay taxes destined for the king and his army. Over the course of a century, the obligation to pay taxes seems to have become equal to paying a land rent and became a personal obligation to the king, if we understand Procopius correctly.⁴⁸ The bulk of the armed followers forming the Vandal army, however, remained stationed in the cities and received the usual stipends of a regular Roman soldier and land out of the fisc and the *agri deserti* as happened everywhere else in the empire. There are no indications of a dispersion of Vandal farmers in the countryside, neither in the historical sources nor in the archaeological record. Each of the 22 instances of actual or possible Vandal locations admirably put together by Yves Modéran either concern activities of the Arian clergy during the persecutions of the Catholics, or graves of the owner families of the estates; in other words high functionaries and nobles of the realm.⁴⁹ For Salvian the Vandals are city dwellers. He speaks of '*populos Wandalarum ... ingressi urbes opulentissimas*'⁵⁰ and puts the rhetorical question, '*Quis credat Wandalos in civitatibus romanis ista fecisse?*'⁵¹ And they were, sooner or later, indistinguishable from the Roman provincials of Africa in their costume and habits. What distinguished them was religion and an occupation in the Vandal army. Significantly, it was as soldiers that the Vandals were deported by Justinian and used in his Persian wars.

⁴⁸ Procopius, *BV.*, I.5.11.

⁴⁹ Modéran, 'L'établissement', p. 89.

⁵⁰ Salvian, *De gub. Dei*, VII, 89.

⁵¹ Salvian, *De gub. Dei*, VII, 91.

Chapter 3

The House of Nubel: Rebels or Players?¹

Andy Blackhurst

The ancients themselves were well aware that labelling strategies, employed for political ends, might mislead subsequent historians. The author of the *Historia Augusta*, in his voice as 'Vopiscus', recalled an occasion when he (the fictional Vopiscus) had argued with the historian 'Marcus Fonteius'. The latter asserted that one Firmus, 'who had seized Egypt in the time of Aurelian', was not an emperor but merely a petty brigand (*latrunculus*). Vopiscus and his friends had responded by producing evidence that he had minted coins and styled himself emperor. Marcus Fonteius' appeal to edicts of Aurelian, in which the emperor claimed to have rid the state of the *latrunculus*, Firmus, not even dignifying the latter as a usurper (*tyrannus*), was scorned:

... as though mighty emperors did not always use the term brigand in speaking of those whom they slew when attempting to seize the purple.²

This difference between how protagonists might represent themselves, and how their rivals sought to portray them, is one which must be considered by inquirers into the careers of a later, undoubtedly historical, Firmus, active in North Africa in the 370s, and his brothers. They were the sons of Nubel, *regulus*, 'little king', among the Moors, as Ammianus Marcellinus styled him.³ Their status derived from their position at the interface between, on the one hand, Roman culture and military organization, and, on the other, the native communities, which simultaneously posed a potential threat to Roman order and provided a recruiting ground for its cavalry.⁴ Given the emergence of Moorish polities in early medieval Africa,

¹ I should like to thank Dr Sam Barnish, who read an earlier version of this chapter, for his helpful comments. Any remaining failings are, of course, my responsibility.

² *Hist. Aug., Quad Tyr.*, 2.1-4: '... aut non semper latrones vocitaverint magni principes eos quos invadentes purpuras necaverunt'. See further the discussion in R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 3-4. The episode is also noted by Z. Rubin, 'Mass Movements in Late Antiquity: Appearances and Realities', in I. Malkin and Z. W. Rubinsohn (eds), *Leaders and Masses in the Ancient World* (Leiden, 1995), p. 135, n. 26.

³ Ammianus, 29.5.2.

⁴ On the evolution of Roman relations with the *Mauri* in the North African highlands and on the frontier, see A. N. Sherwin-White, 'The *Tabula* of Banasa and the *Constitutio Antoniniana*', *JRS*, 63 (1973), pp. 86-97; C. R. Whittaker, 'Land and Labour in North Africa', *Klio. Beiträge zur alten Geschichte. Akademie der Wissenschaft der DDR zentral*

alongside the more familiar Vandal and Byzantine regimes, this family must inevitably be of interest to students of that later period.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the activities of these paradigms of 'the frontier man who lived simultaneously in two worlds',⁵ and, not least, to stress the importance of their *Roman* identity. This is necessary because of the frequency with which modern authors introduce their discussion of Nubel's sons with descriptions such as 'Moorish chieftain' or 'African prince'.⁶ It has been recognized that much past writing on the 'Romanization' of Africa was influenced by colonialist agendas. An anglophone author, T. R. S. Broughton, in his *The Romanisation of Africa Proconsularis* of 1929, described Rome's acquisitions in much the same terms of 'civilizing mission' as were employed of more recent European colonies and, in describing the indigenous population's response, he appealed to his readers' perception of more recent colonial history:

Like the Indians and half-breeds in the Canadian northwest, the tribesmen rebelled, and were finally pacified only after seven years of guerrilla warfare.⁷

French and Italian authors, familiar with their countries' contemporary colonial experiences in the Maghreb, were equally prone to interpret African archaeology in terms of those experiences, and in accord with imperial objectives. If Broughton did not over-emphasize the impact of immigration, others attributed the expansion of agriculture (and the resultant wealth) to the introduction of Roman technology and the settlement of Roman colonists.⁸

institut für alte geschichte und Archäologie 2/60 (1978), pp. 331–62, esp. 344–50; B. D. Shaw, 'Autonomy and tribute: mountain and plain in Mauretania Tingitana', in P. Baduel (ed.), *Desert et Montagne: Homage à Jean Dresch. Revue de l'occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 41–42. (Aix-en-Provence, 1986), pp. 66–99; repr. in B. D. Shaw, *Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa* (Aldershot, 1995).

⁵ B. D. Shaw, 'War and Violence', in G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar (eds), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), p. 154, describing Nubel.

⁶ For Nubel introduced as a 'Moorish chief', see J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), p. 369; for Gildo introduced as a 'Mauretanian chieftain', see J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops* (Oxford, 1990), p. 24; for Gildo introduced as an 'African prince', see A. Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970), p. 93.

⁷ T. R. S. Broughton, *The Romanisation of Africa Proconsularis* (Baltimore, 1928, repr. New York, 1968), both quotations, p. 91.

⁸ Thus J. Birebent, *Aquae Romanae. Recherches d'hydraulique romaine dans l'est Algérien* (Algiers, 1962), *passim*, assumes that major water projects resulted from initiatives of the Roman imperial administration. In fact, local initiative played a crucial role, and the technology had Punic-era precedents. Of the undoubted economic growth of the early imperial period, current archaeological opinion concludes that, 'This revolution did not involve new crops or new methods, but an intensification and expansion of the pre-existing Carthaginian, Libyphoenician and African production', see D. J. Mattingly, *Tripolitania* (London, 1995), p. 138. In Tripolitania, there is little evidence of settlers from outside Africa or of retired soldiers, see Mattingly, *Tripolitania*, p. 143.

Despite this recognition, perceptions of the Moors are still influenced by interpretations fostered in these works. Moreover, it is arguable that the end of the colonial era had an equal impact. Important works, still shaping our perceptions of late Roman Africa, such as Frend's *The Donatist Church* and Brisson's *Autonomisme et christianisme dans l'Afrique romaine*, were produced against the backdrop of Libyan independence and rising nationalism in French North Africa. These works explored the limits, failure, and eventual reversal of 'Romanization'. Subsequently, post-colonial studies have become fashionable and scholars such as Laroui and Bénabou have focused on the 'resistance' offered by native communities to alien impositions.⁹

Other scholars have been alert to the risk that such approaches impose an anachronistic frame of reference upon the interpretation of Antiquity.¹⁰ Nevertheless, there remains a possibility that our perceptions of the sons of Nubel may be distorted if the language used of them in Antiquity resonates too easily with categories established in recent colonial and post-colonial discourse. It is therefore important to set the family in their full political context.

THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Nubel had at least six sons, some legitimate, some 'the offspring of concubines'.¹¹ Firmus, identified by Ammianus as a legitimate son, bears a respectable Roman name. Sammac, Gildo, Mascezel, Dius and Mazuca all bear names that indicate their ethnic background. Indigenous, 'tribal', political organization remained important in Africa, and the family rose to prominence through their influence among the tribes. This much can be determined from a verse inscription commissioned by Nubel's son, Sammac, owner of the *fundus Petrensis*, a fortified estate built up, in the words of Ammianus, 'like a city'.¹² The inscription clearly presented his role as that of mediator between the world of the Romans and the world of the indigenous tribes:

With prudence he establishes a stronghold of eternal peace and with faith he guards everywhere the Roman State... at last the tribes of the region, eager to put down war, have joined as your allies Sammac, so that strength united with faith in all duties shall always be joined to Romulus's triumphs.¹³

Thus we see that the brothers were landowners, who had a role in providing security for the settled population. A similar phenomenon occurred in Tripolitania, where

⁹ See A. Laroui, *L'histoire du Maghreb, un essai de synthèse* (Paris, 1970); M. Bénabou, *La Résistance africaine à la romanisation* (Paris, 1978).

¹⁰ See P. Garnsey, 'Rome's African Empire under the Principate', in P. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker (eds), *Imperialism in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 223–54.

¹¹ Ammianus, 29.5.2.

¹² Ammianus, 29.5.12.

¹³ ILS 9351. Tr. in M. Brett and E. Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford, 1996), p. 72.

frontier society was organized around fortified farmsteads, and based on traditional Libyan clans. Inscriptions at Bir Dreder refer to Iulius Nasif, Flavius Isiguar, and Flavius Masinthan, who bore the Roman military designation *tribunus*, while being, evidently, landowners of local ancestry.¹⁴ Not all those who erected fortified *centenaria* claimed such titles, however; other local men of consequence might take the initiative.¹⁵

The duties of a tribune might include hearing the oaths taken by 'barbarians', such as the Arzuges, when they were 'engaged to carry baggage to any part or to protect the crops from degradation'.¹⁶ This illustrates both the interdependence of overtly 'tribal' African natives and their neighbours on the estates and in the towns, and the tribes' customary role as hired security.¹⁷ Sammac's inscription places him in this type of role; a representative of 'Roman' authority, while simultaneously owner of lands occupied by a settled fraction of the Moorish people, and acknowledged kin of less settled neighbours. The nature of his 'Roman' authority is unspecified, but Ammianus refers to his close friendship with Romanus, the *Comes* of Africa.¹⁸

THE REVOLT OF FIRMUS

Frend located the cause of Firmus' revolt in over-taxation; a motivation suggested by the account of Zosimus and supported by a remark of Ammianus.¹⁹ However, as Matthews has pointed out, Ammianus' main narrative suggests a dynastic quarrel: Sammac was assassinated, allegedly at the behest of Nubel's legitimate son, Firmus. The exact circumstances are unknown. Firmus perhaps believed that he could justify his actions, if necessary. Romanus, however, denounced his friend's murderer, and his connections at court – who ensured that his reports reached the emperor – also contrived to block 'the arguments which Firmus through his friends frequently presented in his defence'.²⁰ According to Ammianus, Firmus, in despair, rebelled against the empire. As a result, the African Firmus has sometimes been counted as a would-be usurper, sometimes as a Moorish separatist.

¹⁴ C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (London, 1994), pp. 145–7 and 260–261; Mattingly, *Tripolitania*, pp. 205–7.

¹⁵ IRT 889, cited in Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, p. 147.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Ep.*, 290: Publicola, writing to Augustine.

¹⁷ Isauria, too, was a region of fortified farms and partially autonomous highlanders. See K. Hopwood, 'Bandits, elites, and rural order', in A. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London, 1989), pp. 180–81, for a description of the *pyrgos* at Emerye Kalesi, and pp. 183–4 for the role of the citizens of Germanicopolis in bringing an end to the Isaurian 'revolt' of 367 (Ammianus, 27.9.7.). We may imagine that the leading citizens of the city had familial ties to their non-urbanized neighbours.

¹⁸ Ammianus, 29.5.2.

¹⁹ Frend, *The Donatist Church*, pp. 72–3. cf. Zosimus, IV.16.3 and Ammianus, 29.5.2.

²⁰ Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 368–9.

Firmus reportedly underwent a form of investiture, being 'crowned' by a Roman tribune and subsequently appearing before his army dressed in a Roman cloak.²¹ Kotula, however, has dismissed the notion that Firmus could be counted among would-be usurpers of the imperial title. An inscription from Calama had sometimes been held to demonstrate that Firmus' imperial title was recognized in eastern Numidia. Kotula followed Gsell, however, in judging that the unnamed Augustus mentioned therein was actually Julian the Apostate (Calama, certainly, was well to the east of the area in which Firmus was active).²² Kotula pointed instead to other terms used of Firmus by Ammianus, *perduellis* ('national enemy'), *rebellis* ('insurgent') and *latro* ('brigand'), and to the words of Augustine, *rex barbarus* ('barbarian king'),²³ and of Orosius who declared that Firmus *sese excitatis Maurorum gentibus regem constituens* ('made himself king, after arousing the Moorish tribes').²⁴ Firmus, Kotula concluded, was not a would-be emperor, but a Moorish king, for whom success would have meant the detachment of Mauretania from the empire, and who embodied the 'eternal Jugurtha' - the Berber, ever opposed to Rome.²⁵

More recently, Tilley has characterized Firmus as a 'revolutionary leader'; the head of a 'Mauretanian-Circumcellion-Donatist alliance' against onerous taxation, and implicitly presents antipathy to 'Roman' interests as a unifying factor.²⁶ Rubin, similarly, has characterized him as the leader of 'an ethnic uprising'.²⁷ Even Matthews saw Firmus as subject to 'tribal ambitions'.²⁸

'Tribal ambitions' may have prompted the elimination of Sammac. It was the successful efforts of Romanus to prevent his explanations reaching Valentinian's ears that forced Firmus into a rebellion. Attention should perhaps be given here to Symmachus' report of the actions of one Valerianus, a senator resident in Epirus, who repeatedly disregarded court orders and who:

... recently, when he was being prosecuted in a civil action and also on a criminal charge unbecoming to a citizen resisted every legal order; to this effect officials of the urban prefecture have made attestations partly by laying information, partly by statement. Indeed one official, after the agents whose duty it was to carry out your sacred directive had died, gave notice that severe injuries had been inflicted on himself by Valerianus.²⁹

²¹ Ammianus, 29.5.20.

²² T. Kotula, 'Firmus, Fils de Nubel, était-il usurpateur ou roi des maures?', *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 18 (1970), pp. 138-40.

²³ Augustine, *Contra Ep. Parm.* 1.10.16; 11.17.

²⁴ Oros., *Hist.*, VII.33.5.

²⁵ Kotula, 'Firmus, fils de Nubel', p. 146.

²⁶ M. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis, MN, 1997), p. 94.

²⁷ Rubin, 'Mass Movements in Late Antiquity', p. 168.

²⁸ Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, p. 375.

²⁹ Symmachus, *Relationes*, R.H. Barrow (ed. and tr.), *Prefect and Emperor. The Relationes of Symmachus A.D. 384* (Oxford, 1973), 31: 'nunc, cum et actione civili et criminali accusatione premeretur, statutis inciviliter repugnavit, ut apparitores praefecturae urbanae partim suggestionem signarunt. quorum unus agente in rebus eo mortuo, ad quem sacri praecepti executio pertinebat, advectum se a Valeriano gravibus iniuriis indicavit'.

Symmachus passed the case on to the imperial court, on the grounds that the emperor alone had the 'right' (or rather, perhaps, the capacity) to punish 'men of the most powerful rank'.³⁰ Valerianus was quite prepared to pitch his resources, in the shape of his retainers, against the limited coercive resources of the civil administration. Firmus *in extremis* attempted something similar, with the aim of obstructing Romanus' plans until he could be discredited. However, Romanus' contacts at court successfully portrayed Firmus' spreading of disaffection among the tribes (and among the provincial garrison) as rebellion and an imperial expeditionary force was sent to Africa.

Before engaging the rebels, however, Count Theodosius ordered that Romanus be arrested, and subsequently some of his associates were executed. At this news Firmus hurried to make his peace with the emperor's new representative and, indeed, a truce was granted.³¹ Theodosius, however, subsequently made preparations for a punitive operation against Firmus' allies.

Firmus was, in effect, repeatedly forced back into the position of rebel, as Theodosius' continued campaigns disrupted the balance of power relationships in the region.³² Whether Theodosius acted on the orders of Valentinian, or whether he personally had determined on a course which would prolong the war, can only be a matter of speculation.³³

THE ROMAN CONTEXT

Thus the family's identification with, and obligations towards, the tribes are manifest. Is it appropriate, however, to describe them as 'superficially Romanised Moorish kinglets'?³⁴ Sammac's inscription shows us how the friend of the *Comes* wished to be understood. It is in hexameters, with the first and last letters of each line, read vertically, forming the acrostic *Praedium Sammacis*. Sammac was declaring himself the champion of Roman culture, including Latin literary culture.

³⁰ Symmachus, *Relationes*, 31.

³¹ Ammianus, 29.5.8.

³² Ammianus, 29.5.28.

³³ E. A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus* (Cambridge, 1947), p. 90; B. H. Warmington, 'The career of Romanus, *Comes Africae*', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 49 (1956), pp. 55–64. Either way, it would suggest that the court did not fully appreciate the real situation, either giving its general orders which embroiled the province in unnecessary bloodshed, or failing to realize how Theodosius was mishandling the situation. See also H. S. Sivan, 'Why not Marry a Barbarian? Marital Frontiers in Late Antiquity', in R. W. Mathisen and H. Sivan (eds), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 141–5, arguing that *C.Th.*, 3.14.1 was issued specifically in response to the Firmus episode. If so, this law, prohibiting marriage between provincials and barbarians, and threatening capital punishment where unions between provincials and *gentiles* resulted in 'something suspect or criminal', would confirm the impression of 'a lack of specific information' about African conditions at court.

³⁴ Rubin, 'Mass Movements in Late Antiquity', p. 168.

An inscription from Rusguniae may also be noted, in which one Flavius Nuvel, who may be identified with Nubel, described himself as the son of a *vir perfectissimus* and former *Comes* named Saturninus, and stated that he was himself the former commander of the *Equites Armigeri Iuniores*.³⁵ *Perfectissimus* was an equestrian rank carried, under Constantine, by many provincial governors (*praesides*), by *vicarii*, and, prior to the reigns of Valentinian and Valens, by army officers of the rank of *dux*.³⁶ The status of 'companion of the emperor,' *ex comitibus*, might denote an office held or an honour bestowed.³⁷ In either event, it would demonstrate the social standing that Flavius Nuvel's family already enjoyed in Roman society in the first half of the fourth century.

Military service had provided the opportunity for the family to integrate itself into the Roman world. In this case, we can imagine Saturninus settling in to life as an African landowner, after gaining the status *ex comitatibus*, with consequent claims to local authority, perhaps even thereby setting in train the family's rise into history.

Nubel's inscription furthermore records the construction of a church, in which was placed a fragment of the True Cross brought from the Holy Land. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* declined to identify Nubel with Nuvel, holding that such interest in the Cross is a later phenomenon.³⁸ Significantly, however, an inscription from Sitifis, dated to 359, confirms that a cult of the True Cross had arrived in Africa by that date.³⁹ Flavius Nuvel was, then, conversant with the most fashionable forms of Christian piety.⁴⁰

This then was Firmus' heritage and culture. If his mother and grandmother bore non-Roman names, so too did the mother of the future bishop Augustine. We might suppose that as the offspring of Nubel's official wife and the bearer of a Romanized name, Firmus also had some claim to be the principal heir. He was set to carry forward the family's rise as Roman aristocrats, exploiting his links to magistrates and bishops in the cities of Africa and to influential friends overseas. Sammac's established position, and closeness to the *Comes*, hindered his enjoyment of this, hence the murder.

THE CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CONTEXT

Romanitas and dynastic ambition are manifest in the next phase of the family's story. This can be best appreciated if we consider the events from the perspective of

³⁵ *CIL* VIII 9255.

³⁶ A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1964), pp. 525–7.

³⁷ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, pp. 104–5.

³⁸ *PLRE*, I, pp. 635–6.

³⁹ A. Audollent and J. Letaille, 'Mission épigraphique en Algérie', *MEFR*, 10, (1890), p. 441.

⁴⁰ Matthews has suggested that in styling himself 'Flavius Nuvel', Nubel was proclaiming himself a client of the Constantinian dynasty, and that, in fostering the cult, he was demonstrating his familiarity with the latest in religious ideology being promoted by the imperial family. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, p. 373.

the Eastern Empire. In about the year 400, Jerome wrote to a young widow, Ageruchia, exhorting her to abjure remarriage in favour of a life dedicated to religion. He suggested that she might also profit from reading:

... my two letters to Furia and Salvina, of whom the first is daughter-in-law to Probus, some-time consul, and the second daughter to Gildo, who held [command in] in Africa.⁴¹

Evidently, Jerome cited Salvina's descent from Gildo, Firmus' brother, to stress her high status. Effectively, this was a form of name-dropping, for the information was paralleled by the disclosure that Furia was daughter-in-law to Probus, the former consul. Jerome hardly meant, therefore, to suggest anything dishonourable about Salvina.

Gildo himself had emerged into history in about 373, when he actually served under Count Theodosius in the campaign against his brother. Ammianus noted his involvement, during the campaign, in the arrest of an imperial official, Vincentius, and in the capture of the rebel leaders Belles and Fericius.⁴²

Some years later, Gildo was entrusted with the command of all Roman military forces in North Africa, at the initiative of his former commander's son, the Emperor Theodosius. It is generally assumed that Gildo was given the African appointment because he was a long-standing client of the Theodosian house. This move is supposed to have been intended to safeguard Africa against any initiative by the usurper, Magnus Maximus, based in Trier, and to show that Theodosius assumed a protective role towards the regime of the young Valentinian II, based in Milan. It has further been suggested that Gildo proved, in fact, disloyal. Rubin, for example, writes matter-of-factly of his 'vacillating loyalty to the empire from his nomination to the outbreak of his revolt'.⁴³

Epigraphy from Africa does attest that Maximus' regime was recognized there, both together with Valentinian II, Theodosius and Arcadius,⁴⁴ and with his son Victor alone.⁴⁵ If Pacatus' *Panegyric* can be taken at face value, Maximus was able to command African resources during his reign, and was still recognized there at the time of his defeat.⁴⁶ Furthermore, in the summer of 388, as he prepared to meet Maximus in battle in the Balkans, Theodosius was also ordering troops from Egypt to Africa. Were they potentially to be used against Gildo?⁴⁷

⁴¹ Jerome, *Ep.*, 123.18: '... et alios ad Furiam, atque Salvinam, quarum altera Probi quondam consulis nurus, altera Gildonis, qui Africam tenuit, filia est'.

⁴² Ammianus, 29.5.6 and 29.5.24 respectively.

⁴³ Rubin, 'Mass Movements in Late Antiquity', p. 170.

⁴⁴ *CIL* VIII 11025.

⁴⁵ *CIL* VIII 22076.

⁴⁶ Pacatus, *Panegyric*, C. E. V. Nixon and B. S. Rogers (ed. and tr.) *In Praise of the Roman Emperors. The Panegyrici Latini*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 21 (Berkeley, 1994), p. 38.

⁴⁷ See *P.Lips* I.63, cited in S. I. Oost, 'Count Gildo and Theodosius the Great', *Classical Philology*, 57 (1962), p. 28.

In this line of argument, Theodosius, once successful in Europe, neglected to deal with his faithless lieutenant. Instead he opted to bribe him into loyalty, according him, sometime before December 393, the rank of *magister utriusque militiae per Africam*, a unique honour for the commander of Africa's armed forces.⁴⁸ He also found a husband for Gildo's daughter. These acts have been portrayed as errors of judgement.⁴⁹ Cameron claimed that the poet, Claudian, made no mention of disloyalty on Gildo's part in 387, in the two works wherein he discussed Gildo's career, because Theodosius' failure to punish him had become an embarrassment.⁵⁰

Two points must be stressed. First, Gildo was, indeed, long connected with the Theodosian house, but he was also long connected with Maximus. In Ammianus they are mentioned as working together.⁵¹ Maximus may have enjoyed personal links with army units recruited in Africa, for the first units of Gratian's army to defect from Gratian to the usurper were 'Moorish cavalry'. Thus, if Gildo did indeed offer support to his former colleague, this would show him not as a rebel against the empire, but as a player in the game of imperial politics, eager to secure a connection to the very centre of power. Furthermore, until Theodosius determined that coexistence with Maximus was not possible, Gildo need not have perceived himself as truly disloyal to Theodosius. Rather, he favoured a particular outcome to the political manoeuvrings then in progress, in which the empire would be divided between the two men with whom he personally had historic connections.

This leads us to the second point. The timing of Gildo's appointment, possibly late in 385 or in 386, is important. This was exactly the moment when Theodosius' regime was adopting a conciliatory approach to the usurper Maximus. In 386, the consulship of Maximus' Praetorian Prefect, Euodius, was recognized in Theodosius' domains.⁵² Furthermore, according to Zosimus, Theodosius' Praetorian Prefect, Cynegius displayed Maximus' image in public while on a mission to Egypt, and announced that Theodosius was sharing rule with him.⁵³ Some form of agreement between the regimes at Trier and Constantinople at this time might also be implied by Pacatus' claim that Maximus had broken a treaty by invading Italy.⁵⁴ While the civil administration remained answerable to Milan, Gildo's appointment may have been deliberate, installing as head of the military presence in Africa someone whom both real power centres might find acceptable.

In some measure, it would follow, sympathy with Maximus was entirely expected of Gildo. The fact that African epigraphy in this period recognizes Maximus does not establish Gildo's disloyalty to Theodosius. In 386, that was not so unusual in areas directly controlled by Theodosius. Indeed, Maximus was even

⁴⁸ The title is used in *C.Th.*, IX.7.9, dated to 30 December 393.

⁴⁹ In Cameron's view 'a blunder of the first order', see Cameron, *Claudian*, pp. 104–5.

⁵⁰ Cameron, *Claudian*, p. 104.

⁵¹ Ammianus, 29.5.21.

⁵² *C.Th.*, II.33.2; III.4.1; VIII.5.48; IX.44.1 and XII.6.21.

⁵³ Zosimus, IV.37.

⁵⁴ Pacatus, *Panegyric*, 30.1.

recognized elsewhere in Valentinian's territory, at Ostia.⁵⁵ There is no conclusive evidence that the African *annona* was withheld from Italy in the time between Gildo's appointment and Maximus' invasion of Italy.

It is therefore equally valid to suppose that Gildo prospered because Theodosius was satisfied that he had served his purpose adequately: to hold Africa in Theodosius' interests. Later, the poet Claudian implied that Gildo had treacherously stood to one side during the revolt of Eugenius, but, as even the hostile poet was obliged to concede that he had not been openly disloyal, this counts for little.⁵⁶

Too easily, it seems, the assumption is made that 'loyalty to Rome' and the ambitions of a 'Moorish prince' were in conflict.⁵⁷ Thus Rubin speaks of 'loyalty to the empire', rather than 'loyalty to Theodosius'.⁵⁸ Similarly, Tilley argues that Gildo had little respect for Honorius and Arcadius after Theodosius' death, and that he 'saw the chance to restore North Africa to its former glory: he began to try to control Africa for himself'.⁵⁹ Even Cameron, while exposing Claudian's propagandistic techniques, located Gildo's motives in the desire for the greater freedom of the 'nominal suzerainty of distant Constantinople'; a position adopted more recently by Rubin.⁶⁰ This, however, is to underestimate the ties that bound Gildo to the eastern court – ties of family loyalty and dynastic interest. It is time to remind ourselves of the marriage of Gildo's daughter, Salvina, and the circles into which she married.

Gildo's daughter had been married to Nebridius, a nephew of Theodosius' first wife, Flacilla.⁶¹ Nebridius had been 'brought up in the bosom of his aunt',⁶² and, according to Jerome, had been 'the friend, companion, and cousin of princes ... educated along with them'.⁶³ Nebridius lived in the East, and as Jerome says:

The bishops of the whole East brought to him the prayers of the unfortunate and the petitions of the suffering.⁶⁴

Possibly, this Nebridius was the son of a namesake who, while prefect of Constantinople, had married one Olympias only to die within a matter of days. If so, Nebridius junior was also stepson to the granddaughter of Constantine's Praetorian Prefect, Ablabius, an heiress with extensive estates in Thrace and Asia Minor and several properties in Constantinople itself. At the risk of creating a circular

⁵⁵ *CIL* XIV 4410.

⁵⁶ Claudian, *De bello Gildonico*, 247–8.

⁵⁷ Thus S. Raven, *Rome in Africa*, 3rd edn (London, 1993), p. 184: 'after a decade of loyalty to Rome, ambition reasserted itself.'

⁵⁸ Rubin, 'Mass Movements in Late Antiquity', p. 170.

⁵⁹ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, p. 132.

⁶⁰ Cameron, *Claudian*, p. 93. Cf. Rubin, 'Mass Movements in Late Antiquity', p. 171: 'an attempt to swap the nearer authority of the Western Empire for the remoter authority of the Eastern, increasing thereby his virtual independence.'

⁶¹ Jerome, *Ep*, 79.2.

⁶² Jerome, *Ep*, 79.2.

⁶³ Jerome, *Ep*, 79.5.

⁶⁴ Jerome, *Ep*, 79.5: '*Totius Orientalis Episcopi ad hunc miserorum preces, et laborantium desideria conferebant*'.

argument, circumstantial support for this identification can be adduced in the subsequent association of Olympias and Salvina as adherents of John Chrysostom. In 404 they both came to bid farewell to him on his exile from Constantinople.⁶⁵

Salvina, then, had married into the ruling house and into the Constantinopolitan establishment. Meanwhile, Jerome, writing to Salvina, stated that the Emperor Theodosius had procured a 'most noble' wife for Nebridius.⁶⁶ This acknowledgement of Salvina's status is significant, and should influence our assessment of her father. Jerome implied a worthy match for a highborn Roman.

Following Theodosius' death, imperial politics were dominated by the attempts of the western military commander, Stilicho, to assert himself as guardian of both imperial princes. When Gildo first began to break with the Milanese regime – for that was the true nature of his 'rebellion' – his politically active son-in-law was probably still alive. To judge from Jerome, Nebridius' daughter was apparently still a very small child in 400:

She clings to the neck of one, she fastens herself to the arms of another. She prattles and stammers, made the sweeter by her stumbling speech.⁶⁷

If Nebridius' status and role can only be a matter of conjecture, it is certain that Gildo's grandchildren were to be raised at the Constantinopolitan court.⁶⁸ Why should we not assume that Gildo's actions were motivated, first, by loyalty to the house of Theodosius, in the person of the latter's eldest son, as opposed to the interests of the *hostis publicus* Stilicho,⁶⁹ and second, by a rational calculation of his own political advantage as a grandee of the empire, given his connections, through Salvina, with the court of Arcadius?⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of St John Chrysostom*, R. T. Meyer (ed. and tr.), Ancient Christian Writers, 45 (New York, 1975) c.10.

⁶⁶ Jerome, *Ep.*, 79.2.

⁶⁷ Jerome, *Ep.*, 79.6: '*Pendet ex collo, haeret in brachiis singulorum. Garrula atque balbutiens, linguae offensione fit dulcior*'.

⁶⁸ Jerome, *Ep.*, 79.1 was at pains to refute the suggestion that, in writing to her, he sought to achieve access to the imperial court, *aulae nos insinuare regali*. Reportedly, Arcadius and Eudoxia were accustomed to the presence of Gildo's grandchildren, see Jerome, *Ep.*, 79.6.

⁶⁹ Gildo's interdiction of the grain supply to Italy followed the eastern Senate's vote declaring Stilicho a public enemy in summer 397. On declaration as *hostis publicus*, see Zosimus, V.11. At *Cons. Stil.* I, lines 277–8, Claudian conceded that *edicta* emanating from the eastern court, i.e. in the name of Arcadius, were aimed at causing disaffection among western army officers. Presumably, these provided Gildo with a legal justification for his actions. See Cameron, *Claudian*, p. 113 n. 1.

⁷⁰ I differ here from Y. Modéran, 'Gildon, les Maures et l'Afrique', *MEFRA*, 101 (1989), pp. 821–72, an article which anticipated much of the argument I use elsewhere. Modéran placed Salvina at the court of Honorius after her husband's death (p. 844). On the basis of Palladius, and Jerome's reference to the petitions of *eastern* bishops to Nebridius, I place her in Constantinople. Modéran argued cogently that issues of loyalty to Rome or Moorish identity were not significant for Gildo, pointing to the evidence that personal enrichment was his goal. In emphasizing Gildo's eastern connections, I demur from the verdict that Gildo only 'interested himself in Africa' (p. 866), positing ambitions to be a player on a wider stage, and preserving the possibility of genuine attachment to the house of Theodosius.

As Cameron has stressed, the regime centred upon the elder of Theodosius' sons at Constantinople not only continued to recognize Gildo as a properly appointed Roman magistrate, but actively supported the policy which he was pursuing.⁷¹ Ambition was a factor, but not an ambition which gained at the expense of the 'Romans', as though Gildo were not himself a Roman of the highest rank. In the *De bello Gildonico*, Stilicho's propagandist, Claudian, did indeed suggest that Gildo sought to transfer the African territories, on his own initiative, seeing personal advantage therein. At a later date, however, in his panegyric to Stilicho on the general's consulship, he attributed the African crisis to the initiative of the eastern court.⁷² Gildo was, in fact, choosing sides in an empire-wide dispute over power.⁷³

THE LITERARY CONTEXT

Formally speaking, it is certain that Gildo continued to present himself as a loyal servant of the senior Augustus, Arcadius.⁷⁴ The label 'traitor' was applied to Gildo by Stilicho and his spokesmen. Once Gildo had been eliminated – by an expeditionary force entrusted to the leadership of his own estranged brother, Mascezel – the official line of the regime in Milan held that: '... the third tyrant has fallen before the prowess [of Honorius]'.⁷⁵ Claudian styled Gildo *tyrannus*, to suggest the illegitimacy of his rule in Africa. This allowed him to deploy stock accusations against *tyranni*, suggesting a criminal madness which threatened those with property in Africa and which may have been a bid for sympathy among Italian senatorial interests.⁷⁶ The label *tyrannus* carried implications of 'usurper' and, indeed, Gildo was duly compared with Maximus and Eugenius, the usurpers previously defeated by Theodosius, whose shade was depicted as lamenting that his death had prevented his crushing the faithless African himself. This was, however, a device to misrepresent the nature of Gildo's activity. At the same time, Claudian presented the troops under Gildo's command as cowardly, untrained and inadequately armed. In no way did it suit Claudian's purpose to remind his audience that Gildo had deployed units of the imperial garrison in Africa against the expeditionary force despatched from Italy.

⁷¹ Cameron, *Claudian*, p. 103.

⁷² Claudian, *Cons. Stil.*, I.276–8.

⁷³ Note also the comments of Elton, implying that Gildo's transfer of allegiance cannot be assessed in terms of loyalty or otherwise to the Roman State. H. Elton, 'Defining Romans and Barbarians', in R. W. Mathisen and H. Sivan (eds), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 126.

⁷⁴ Note also the verdict of R. Turcan, 'Trésors monétaires trouvés à Tipasa', *Libyca*, 51 (1961), p. 210, upon the coinage issued under Gildo's auspices: 'C'était un usurpateur qui n'aurait pas voulu passer officiellement pour tel'.

⁷⁵ Claudian, *De bello Gildonico*, 5–6: '... tertius occubit nati virtute tyrannis'.

⁷⁶ Thus, with Cameron, *Claudian*, p. 106, we must be sceptical that Gildo 'undertook agrarian reform', as posited by Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 146.

Two factors shaped Claudian's account and were mutually reinforcing. On the one hand there was the force of literary precedent. In constructing an account of a war fought in Africa, Claudian naturally recalled earlier wars in the region, recorded in the classics of the Latin literary canon.⁷⁷ His educated audience would appreciate such echoes. At the same time there was political capital to be garnered from allusions to the Romans' earlier African wars. For rhetorical effect, he might well ask, 'Do the Moors dare to oppose Rome once more?'⁷⁸ To magnify Stilicho, he might well allude to Fabius or to Scipio Africanus.⁷⁹ References to Punic and Mauretanian enemies of Ancient Rome had a political purpose, offering the audience a filter through which to view political developments and a justification for the regime's actions.

A similar process has conditioned the view of Firmus provided by Ammianus Marcellinus. The official position of Valentinian's regime was that Firmus was a traitor. His status as 'rebel' was, though, the creation of Romanus' lobbying of the court, sustained thereafter because it justified the drastic measures taken against him. Given Count Theodosius' role in the suppression of the revolt, this interpretation of the situation remained politic when his son became emperor and his ally, Gildo, became master of Africa. At the same time, Ammianus was writing with a conscious sense of being the successor of Tacitus (who had described the revolt of Tacfarinas) and strongly influenced by the language and historiographical understanding of Sallust, not least in the *Bellum Iurgurthinum*.⁸⁰

The result in both cases is to cut through the complexities of provincial society, with its network of relationships between (largely) Romanized and (virtually) non-Romanized persons. Instead, we are given a confrontation between 'Romans' and 'natives'.⁸¹ The risk is that this resonates too easily with categories current in modern colonialist and post-colonialist discourse.

The risk is compounded because many historians approach late Antique North Africa with a primary interest in Church history. Gildo is thus encountered through the writings of Augustine. The bishop of Hippo, however, was seeking to derive the maximum propaganda value from the downfall of Optatus of Timgad; a Donatist bishop who had apparently cultivated the erstwhile commander assiduously, and who had died in custody following the territories' (re)incorporation into Honorius' domains. It suited Augustine's purposes to echo the language of Claudian,

⁷⁷ The principal literary influence on *De bello Gildonico* was Lucan. See R. T. Bruere, 'Lucan and Claudian: the Invectives', *Classical Philology*, 59 (1964), esp. pp. 246–53.

⁷⁸ Claudian, *De bello Gildonico*, 333.

⁷⁹ Claudian, *Cons. Stil.* I. 380ff.

⁸⁰ Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, p. 32; C. W. Fornara, 'Studies in Ammianus Marcellinus II', *Historia*, 41 (1992), pp. 429–33.

⁸¹ See also Shaw's re-evaluation of the revolt of Tacfarinas in B. D. Shaw, 'Fear and Loathing: The Nomad Menace and Roman Africa', in C. M. Wells (ed.), *Roman Africa/L'Afrique romaine* (Ottawa, 1982), pp. 25–46; repr. in his, *Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa* (Aldershot, 1995), at pp. 36–38.

describing Gildo as 'a monstrous enemy of the Roman order', intent, as he was, to capitalise on the new political settlement in the territory.⁸²

Jerome wrote with a distinctive agenda of his own, but free of the particular polemical objectives of Claudian and Augustine, he avoids characterizing Gildo as anything other than an imperial politician. Admittedly, one remark of Jerome's does come close to supporting the view we might derive from Claudian. When writing to Salvina, he stated that, by her marriage, she had become a kind of hostage, through whom Africa, beset by civil war, had been brought back to her loyalty to the emperor.⁸³ Yet it should be noted that *Africa's* loyalty, rather than Gildo's personally, was the objective. We should not expect Jerome to intend anything that might offend his noble addressee. Jerome acknowledged the political dimension to the match, but he did not imply that Theodosius' objective was not fully attained. Salvina, in Constantinople, was not obliged to believe her father had been anything other than loyal to her emperor and kinsman, Arcadius.

THE EMPEROR'S MAN

There was a kind of precedent for Gildo's ambitions in the career of Lucius Quietus, recorded by Cassius Dio as being both a leader of the Moors and a cavalry officer, who had risen to high command and the governorship of Judaea in Trajan's reign.⁸⁴ The difference was that Gildo was appointed to a command much closer to home. Theodosius, presumably, saw advantages in employing a man familiar with local circumstances and properly qualified to handle the delicate relations between the *gentiles*, the provincials and the imperial court. Gildo was placed in a very powerful position. His influence would be all the stronger if he had already had a role in advising Theodosius the elder on the 'proven loyalty' of the men whom the latter installed as prefects of the tribes during the campaign against Firmus.⁸⁵

Yet in the circumstances of 398, Gildo's position proved surprisingly fragile. His army reportedly broke after the minimum of fighting by the Ardalio.⁸⁶ Gildo sought refuge not among the tribes but on a ship, hoping to reach the East. An explanation may be offered in part by reference to the Moorish aspect of Gildo's world. Anthropologists have observed that, among more recent Berber societies, authority was distributed between the segments of the tribe, with the 'tribe' being, in reality, a constellation of clans, shifting and, ultimately, ephemeral. In discussing this, Whittaker quotes Livy's observation that, 'There was a dislike of kings with great authority'.⁸⁷ Gildo's prestige would have to be underpinned by special

⁸² Augustine, *Contra Ep. Parm.*, I.11.17.

⁸³ Jerome, *Ep.*, 79.2.

⁸⁴ Dio Cass., 68.32.

⁸⁵ Ammianus, 29.5.4.

⁸⁶ Oros., *Hist.*, VII.36.

⁸⁷ Whittaker, 'Land and Labour', p. 333.

considerations if he were to maintain his pre-eminence over potential rivals and heads of allied tribes – as indeed it was by the exceptional marks of favour which he obtained from Theodosius. One is reminded of the attitude attributed to the sixth-century Moors by Procopius:

... According to Moorish custom, no one can rule over them before the Romans give him the symbols of government.⁸⁸

While Theodosius lived, Gildo was the emperor's man in Africa. The division of the empire after 395 posed a problem, however. Gildo's closest ties to the Theodosian establishment were to Arcadius' court. His continued authority in Africa, and his standing in the imperial system, were both dependent on his relationship with Constantinople.

His nemesis, his brother Mascezel, was also a player in both African and Roman politics. He had survived defeat as an ally of Firmus, and was well placed to capitalize on any resentment of Gildo's self-aggrandizement. When Honorius entrusted him with the expeditionary force against Gildo, he too was securing the benefits of local knowledge and standing.

At the same time, Mascezel, like his father, was conversant with fashionable Christian piety. Mascezel's particular expressions of devotion suggest that his overseas connections were strong among Italian Catholics. These may have included families for whom the monastic settlement on Capraria held special significance, since Orosius records that Mascezel paused there to pray before leaving for Africa, and that some of the monks journeyed with him. Orosius also reports that Mascezel had a vision of the deceased bishop, Ambrose, three days before the battle.⁸⁹ Sincere or fraudulent, such a vision betokens a preoccupation with the Christian sensibilities of Milan. Cameron observed that Mascezel was probably 'trying to ingratiate himself with the powerful Catholic party at court'.⁹⁰ There is no reason to suppose that this was new phenomenon. If Mascezel actually meant to claim that he recognized Ambrose from life, he implied that he had visited Milan before April 397.

While Gildo's assessment of his prospects had involved attaching Africa to the East, in previous divisions of the empire between colleagues it had invariably remained associated with Italy. Many African estates were actually owned by Italian senators and western aristocrats were routinely appointed as civil governors. African shipping was built around the transport of the *annona* to Italy. Gildo's policy threatened to upset extensive networks of contact. Having secured Honorius' commission, Mascezel returned to Africa in part as champion of those interests in Africa, who looked across the narrow sea to Italy rather more than to the new imperial capital at Constantinople.

⁸⁸ Procopius, *BV.*, I.25.5ff. See also Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, p. 65.

⁸⁹ Oros., *Hist.*, VII.36.

⁹⁰ Cameron, *Claudian*, p. 116.

CONCLUSIONS

The epigraphic record indicates that, in the latter part of the fifth century, effective power in Mauretania was wielded by men whose names proclaim their Moorish background: men such as the *praefectus* Iugmena, sponsor of a church built sixty kilometres south of Icosium in 474, completed by the Zagrenses,⁹¹ Masties, a *dux* turned *imperator*,⁹² and Masuna, *rex Maurorum et Romanorum*.⁹³ These were men whose authority derived from their standing with the Moors, in their ability to mediate between them and the settled population, and their access to the military force which the tribesmen might provide. The language in which their power was expressed remained Roman. The Masuna inscription from Altava refers to *praefecti* and to a *procurator* who served under him, while Masties enjoyed a Roman military title, *dux*, as did 'Egregrius', a possible precursor of Masuna.⁹⁴

This is all reminiscent of the situation posited in Sammac's inscription. Where Sammac used Latin verse to emphasize his civilized virtues, even as the text acknowledged the Moorish base of his power, so these men are commemorated in Latin inscriptions, which were often dated according to the provincial year. There is something of the same dual, part-Roman, part-Moorish identity about them. There is also more than a hint that 'Roman identity' had become partly a matter of baptism. The pyramidal tombs of Egregrius' putative dynasty at Tiaret were ornamented with Christian symbols and Iugmena is remembered for his sponsorship of a church.⁹⁵ This is interesting because it too seems to repeat an example set by Nubel, and followed by his sons and granddaughter.

The critical difference, however, is that in the years after 476 horizons had, perforce, been narrowed. This chapter has argued that we do the House of Nubel a disservice if we impose too narrow a range of ambition upon it. In order to establish exactly how the rivals among the family compared with, or differed from, luminaries from other regions, we must be careful to avoid such labels as 'romanized native chieftain', and consider them in the totality of their identities. As Roman aristocrats, Nubel's family were not unique in exploiting a local power base in order to play a role at the centre. In the Theodosian era, the family of Tatianus appears to have survived the vagaries of court politics over several generations, due to its importance in south-west Asia Minor.⁹⁶

A better understanding of the family's incorporation into local power structures, including patronage of, and negotiation with, the local churches, and their

⁹¹ *PLRE*, II, p. 634.

⁹² *PLRE*, II, p. 734.

⁹³ *CIL* VIII 9835. See also G. Camps, 'Rex gentium Maurorum et Romanum': Recherches sur les royaumes de Mauretanie des VI et VII siècles', *Ant. af.*, 20 (1984), p. 194.

⁹⁴ Camps, 'Rex gentium Maurorum et Romanum', p. 202.

⁹⁵ Frend, *The Donatist Church*, p. 304.

⁹⁶ P. Heather, 'New Men for New Constantines?', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), p. 29.

simultaneous involvement with imperial politics, will then help us in assessing the dealings between the brothers and Donatist bishops. We might, for example, see the origins of the schism among Mauretanian Donatists, between ‘Rogatists’ and ‘Firmiani’, as springing precisely from choices made when provincial society split for or against Firmus,⁹⁷ rather than primarily from a particular theological dispute. Moreover, the unusually well-attested Christian connections of the family deserve to be explored, as a case-study in the Christianization of the Roman world, without the distraction of any supposed roles as ‘champions’ of a Donatist cause. The House of Nubel was strongly Christian, although Firmus’ attention to the African cult of St Salsa did not win him the cooperation of that saint’s home city.⁹⁸ Indeed, Nubel, Mascezel and Salvina subscribed to Christianity of a distinctly ‘Catholic’ cast: the cult of the True Cross, associated with Helena; the memory of St Ambrose; the cause of John Chrysostom. In part, perhaps, the faith had functioned as a medium through which the family could enter Roman high society, and through which it could articulate its claim, both in Africa and overseas, to be an integral part of the Christian Empire’s elite.

The brothers did enjoy a wider stage than their fifth- or sixth-century successors. Gildo had looked to his ties with the court of Arcadius in Constantinople. Mascezel had looked to Italy. As we have seen, he combined military success with a taste for piety of a kind which might endear him to Italian Catholic circles. Mascezel too was a player in the game of imperial politics. Certainly, Stilicho found it expedient to have him murdered.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *Ep.*, 87.10

⁹⁸ *Passio Salsae*, in *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum latinarum*, Subsidia hagiographica, 25 (Brussels, 1883), 13.

Chapter 4

From Arzuges to Rustamids: State Formation and Regional Identity in the Pre-Saharan Zone¹

Alan Rushworth

This chapter focuses on the late antique–early medieval transition in the pre-Saharan zone of North Africa. In particular, it examines the dynamic processes unleashed there, following the collapse of Roman imperial authority, which resulted in what had been a peripheral frontier zone of the Mediterranean-centred empire becoming the core of new regional polities. The chapter also highlights the long-standing, distinct identity of the pre-Saharan populations and the way that identity was periodically refashioned during this period, in the face of changing political circumstances, to ensure the region's communities retained the maximum possible degree of autonomy.

The pre-Saharan zone is the name generally given to the band of semi-arid, inland plains, high steppe and mountains which separate the *Tell* – the mountainous, well-watered, Mediterranean districts of the Maghreb – to the north, from the Sahara desert to the south. It receives, on average, annual rainfall of between 100mm and 400mm. The importance and distinctiveness of the pre-desert steppe and mountains has been well-highlighted by Lawless, building on the work of Despois and De Planhol.²

¹ Many thanks to Mark Handley for organizing the original session on Early Medieval Africa at the 2000 International Medieval Congress, where this chapter was first given as a paper, and to Andy Merrills for supervising the transformation of that session into the present volume. I would also like to thank the conference delegates for their helpful comments. I am grateful to The Darwin Press for allowing reproduction of the excerpt from page 56 of Elizabeth Savage's *A Gateway to Hell, A Gateway to Paradise. The North African Response to the Arab Conquest*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, 7 (Princeton, NJ, 1997), and to Frank Cass and Company Ltd. for allowing reproduction of the quoted passage from Robert Montagne's *The Berbers: Their Social and Political Organisation*, tr. D. Sneddon (London, 1973). I would also like to thank John Dore for supplying the photographs of the Wadi Buzra and Khafagi Aamer (Figs. 4.7–4.9).

² R. I. Lawless, 'The Concept of *Tell* and *Sahara* in the Maghreb: A Reappraisal', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 57 (1972), pp. 125–37; 'Population, Resource Appraisal and Environment in the Pre-Saharan Zone of the Maghreb', in X. de Planhol (ed.) *Maghreb et Sahara: Etudes géographiques offertes à Jean Despois* (Paris, 1973), pp. 229–37; cf. J. Despois, 'La bordure saharienne de l'Algérie orientale', *Revue africaine*, 86 (1942), pp. 196–219; X. De Planhol, 'Caractères généraux de la vie

Gambar dengan hak cipta

Figure 4.1 North Africa: Relief and major regional divisions (with the principal inland centres of the early Islamic era marked)

Throughout much of Antiquity the pre-Sahara formed the frontier zone of Roman Africa, a region peripheral to the concerns of the provincial elites esconced in the cities of the coast and the fertile Tell hill-country. However, it has long been recognized that during the early medieval period, following the Arab conquest, North Africa's political centre of gravity lay further inland, in the former frontier region, at newly founded urban centres such as Sijilmassa, Tlemcen, Tahart, Achir, Qal'a of the Beni Hammad.³ Even Kairouan, the most significant of the new foundations, though firmly within the core of the old African provinces – 'Ifriqiya' as it was henceforth known – represented a move inland from Carthage to the edge of the Tunisian steppe.

The origins of this inland shift may actually be traced back into late Antiquity, with the formation of sub-Roman successor states in the African provinces during the fifth and sixth centuries AD, particularly in the western province of Mauretania Caesariensis.

In his monumental work, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique*, Courtois outlined the evidence for a series of small Moorish states or chiefdoms, the majority of which were centred on the former imperial Roman frontier zone (*limes*).⁴ The evidence for one of the polities he identified is worth examining in particular. This was centred in western Caesariensis (modern western Algeria), near Tiaret, a settlement on the frontier highway, or *nova praetentura*, established under Septimius Severus.⁵

SUCCESSOR STATE EVIDENCE: THE DJEDARS

The principal evidence for this polity takes the form of a remarkable series of massive funerary monuments, known locally as the 'Djedars' or 'structures'. A total of 13 of these square mausolea, of fine ashlar construction surmounted by stepped pyramids, occur at two sites in this region (ten at Ternaten on the Djebel Araoui⁶ and three at Djebel Lakdhar⁷) 20–26km south-south-west of Tiaret and 13–16km

montagnarde dans le Proche-Orient et dans l'Afrique du Nord', *Annales géographiques*, 384 (1962), pp. 113–30 and *Les fondements géographiques de l'histoire de l'Islam* (Paris, 1968).

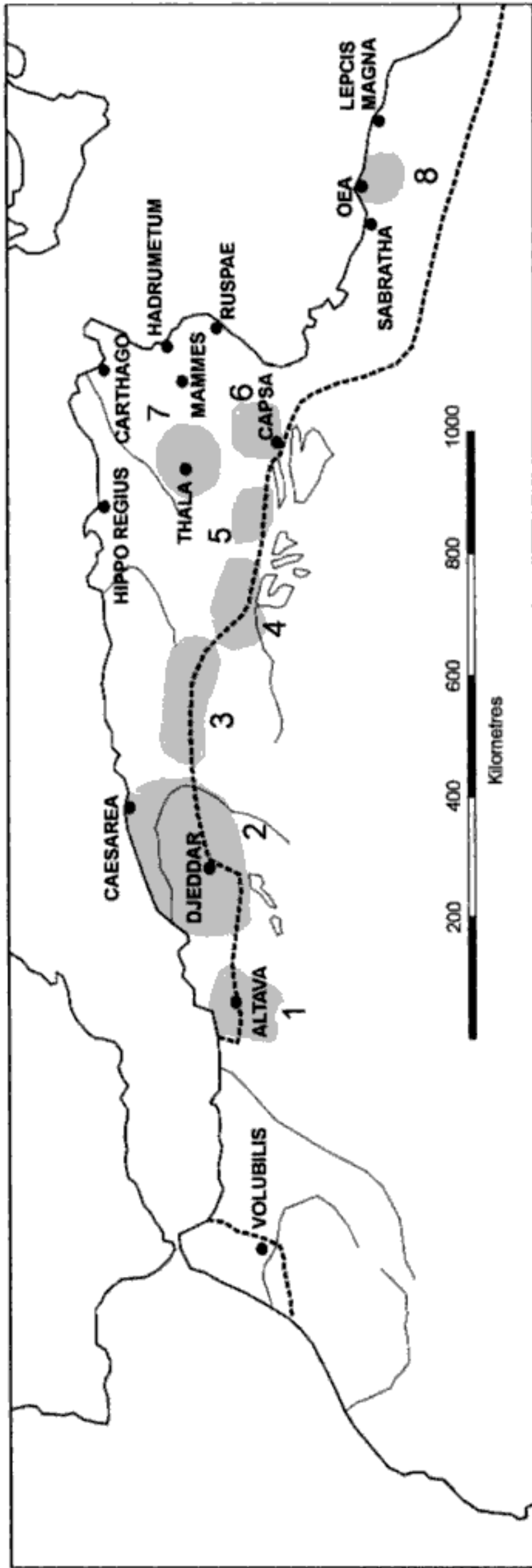
³ Cf. Lawless, 'The concept of *Tell* and *Sahara*', p. 131; 'Population, Resource Appraisal and Environment', p. 231.

⁴ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 333–9; cf. also D. Pringle, *The Defence of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab Conquest*, BAR International Series, 99. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1981), pp. 13–16.

⁵ E. Albertini, 'La route-frontière de la Maurétanie Césarienne entre Boghar et Lalla Maghnia', *BSGAO*, 48 (1928), pp. 33–48; P. Salama, 'Nouveaux témoignages de l'oeuvre des Sévères dans la Maurétanie Césarienne', *Libyca*, 1 (1953), pp. 231–61 and 3 (1955), pp. 329–65; 'Les déplacements successifs du limes en Maurétanie Césarienne (Essai de synthèse)', in J. Fitz (ed.), *Limes: Akten des XI Internationalen Limeskongresses* (Budapest, 1977), pp. 577–95; C. M. Daniels, 'The Frontiers: Africa', in J. S. Wachter (ed.), *The Roman World* vol. 1 (London and New York, 1987), pp. 223–65 at p. 254.

⁶ Gsell, *AAA*, 33:66.

⁷ Gsell, *AAA*, 33:67.



1. Kingdom of Altava
2. Kingdom of the Ouarsenis
3. Kingdom of the Hodna
4. Kingdom of the Aures

5. Kingdom of the Nemenchas
6. Kingdom of Capsus (?)
7. Kingdom of the Dorsale
8. Kingdom of Cabaon

Figure 4.2 Moorish successor states (after Christian Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* (Paris, 1955), p. 334)

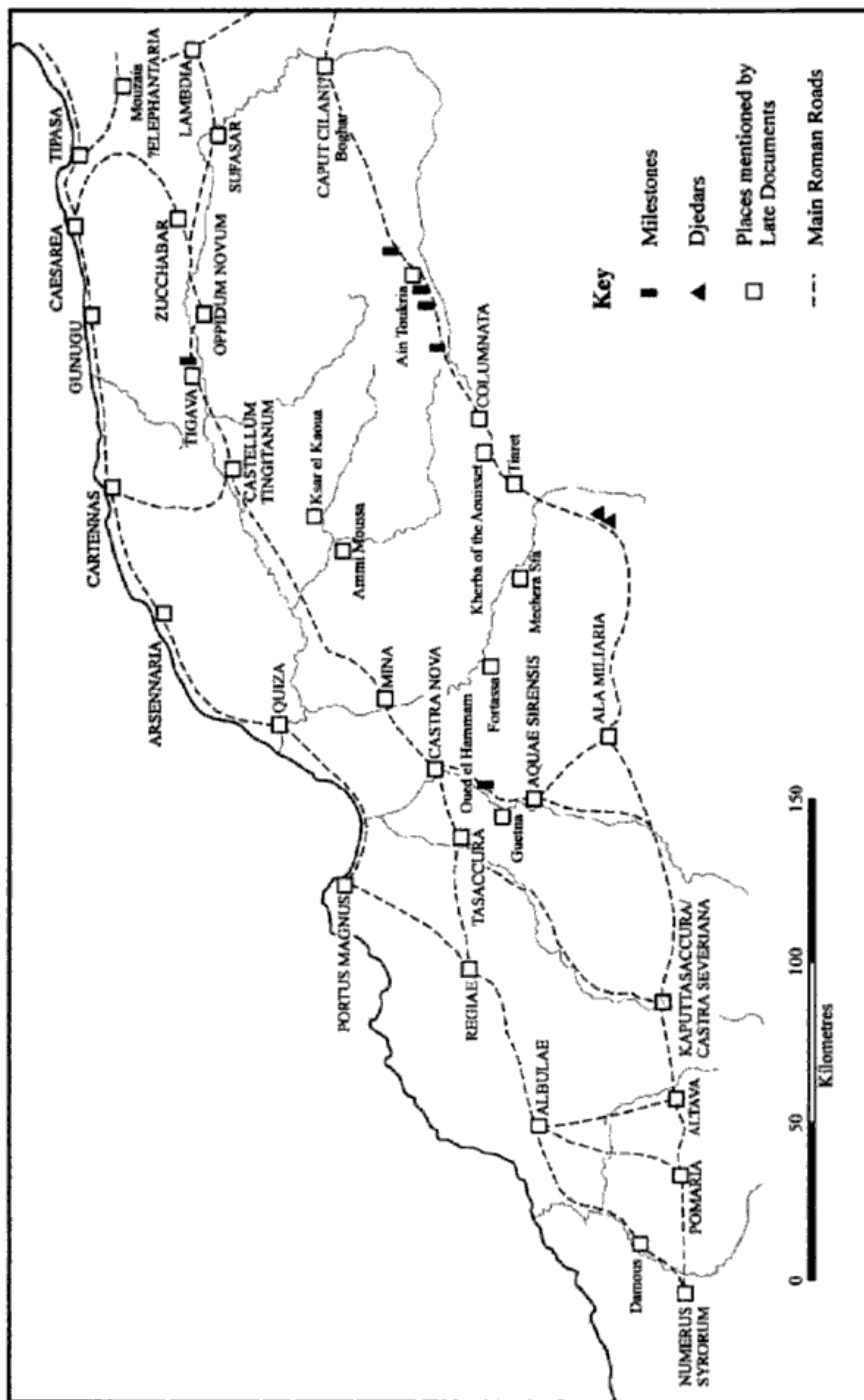


Figure 4.3 Western Mauretania Caesariensis in Late Antiquity

east of the modern town of Frenda. The monuments have provoked admiration ever since the expedition of the Fatimid caliph, al-Mansur, in the mid-tenth century (recorded by the Arab chronicler, Ibn Rakik, in an excerpt preserved in the *Kitab al-Ibar* or 'Universal History' of Ibn Khaldun) and attracted the attention of numerous scholars of the French colonial era, most notably La Blanchere⁸ and Gsell,⁹ and later Camps.¹⁰ More recently they have been the subject of intensive study by Kadra, including a programme of extensive excavation at Djedar A on the Djebel Lakhdar which has revealed an enclosure wall and an associated building on the east side, presumably designed for mortuary or other ceremonial practices such as incubation.¹¹

A C¹⁴ date of 410 \pm 50, calibrated to AD 490 \pm 50, was obtained by Kadra from Djedar B on the Djebel Lakhdar. This date would accord with that applied on stylistic criteria to the decorative carvings and Christian motifs on Djedars A and B, which suggests that the Lakhdar trio probably represent the earlier of the two groups of monuments. Unfortunately the dedicatory inscriptions *in situ* on Djedars A and B (the latter a bilingual Latin-Greek example), which would doubtless have supplied the names and careers of the individuals buried within, are virtually illegible. The largest of the Ternaten group, Djedar F (or 'the Great Djedar of Ternaten'), incorporates much reused stonework, including a Severan dedication of 202-203 AD marking the foundation of an *oppidum*,¹² and epitaphs dated to 433, 466, 480 and 490,¹³ all presumably derived from ruined or redundant structures in neighbouring settlements. A late sixth-century date has been assigned to this structure, which must have placed great demands on the available supply of building stone, new or reused, on account of its massive size.

While their architectural form echoes a long tradition of massive, North African royal mausolea, stretching back to Numidian and Mauretanian kingdoms of third-first centuries BC,¹⁴ the closest parallels are with the tumuli or *bazinas*, with flanking 'chapels', which are distributed in an arc through the pre-Saharan zone and beyond

⁸ M. R. de La Blanchere, 'Voyage d'étude dans une partie de la Maurétanie Césarienne', *Archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires*, 3rd series, 10 (1883), pp. 1-129 at pp. 77-99, 127-9.

⁹ S. Gsell, *Les monuments antiques de l'Algérie*, 2 vols, vol 1 (Paris, 1901), pp. 418-27.

¹⁰ G. Camps, *Aux origines de la Berbérie: Monuments et rites funéraires protohistoriques* (Paris, 1961), pp. 590-91.

¹¹ F. Kadra, *Les Djedars, monuments funéraires berbères de la région de Frenda (Wilaya de Tiaret, Algérie)* (Aix en Provence, 1974); 'Der Djedar A von Djebel Lakhdar, ein spätes Berbermonument', in H. G. Horn and C. B. Ruger (eds), *Die Numider: Reiter und Könige nordlich der Sahara* (Bonn/Cologne, 1979), pp. 119-71; *Les Djedars, monuments funéraires berbères de la région de Frenda (Wilaya de Tiaret, Algérie)* (Algiers, 1983).

¹² Salama, 'Nouveaux témoignages' (1955), pp. 329-42.

¹³ Kadra, *Les Djedars* (1974), pp. 260-281.

¹⁴ cf. F. Rakob, 'Numidische Königsarchitektur in Nordafrika', in H. G. Horn and C. B. Ruger (eds), *Die Numider: Reiter und Könige nordlich der Sahara* (Bonn, 1979), pp. 132-45; E. W. B. Fentress, *Numidia and the Roman Army: Social, Military and Economic Aspects of the Frontier Zone*, BAR International Series, 53 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 55-6.

Obrázek chráněný autorskými právy

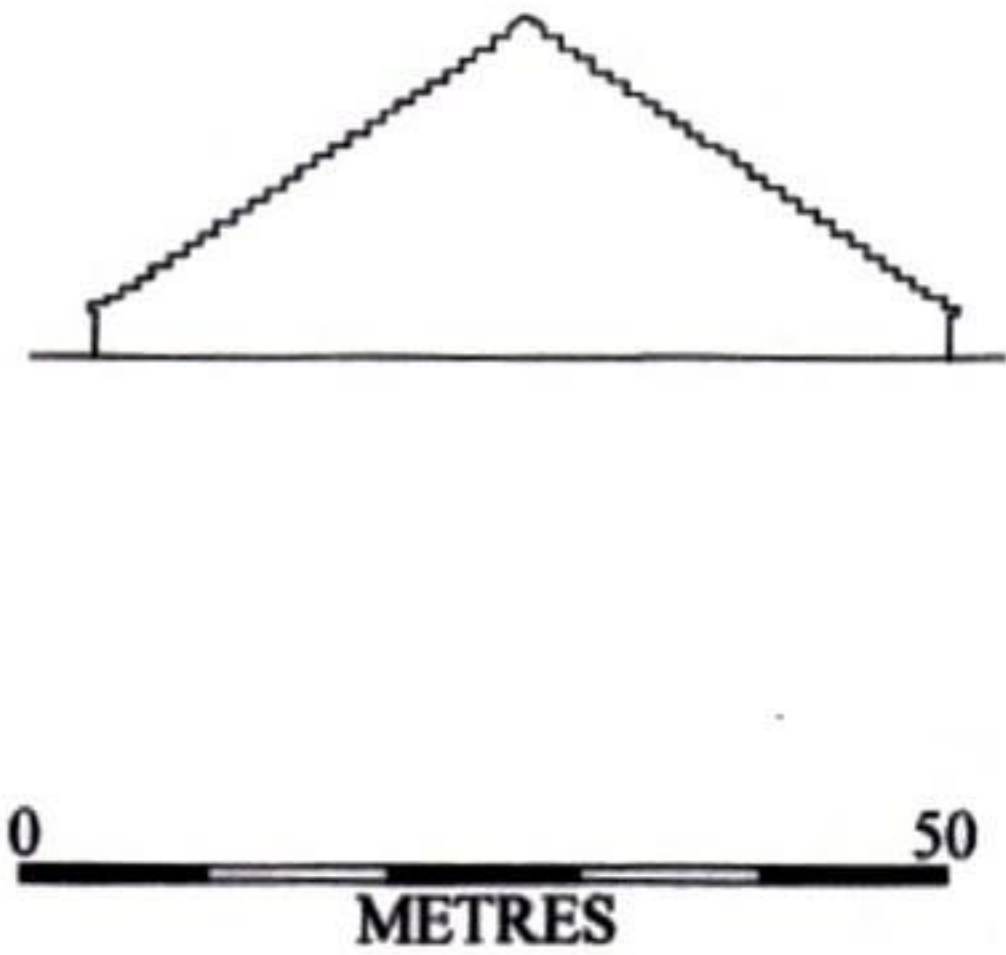


Figure 4.4 Plan and profile of one of the Djedars

from Negrine on the southern margins of the Nemenchas Mountains in the east to the present-day Western Sahara and Mauritania in the south west.¹⁵ The Djedars could thus be considered the ultimate development of an indigenous, pre-Saharan funerary architectural tradition, adapted to fit a Christian, Romanized environment. They probably represent the tombs of a local dynasty perhaps beginning in the fifth century with the erection of the Djebel Lakhdar monuments and continuing up to the Arab conquest at the end of the seventh century. Just how extensive the state controlled by that dynasty was remains uncertain. Courtois envisaged it as merely one of a string of small polities distributed throughout the pre-Saharan zone, but Camps has suggested that the occupants of these great funerary monuments ruled a kingdom embracing most of Mauretania Caesariensis.¹⁶

A most significant aspect is the location of these dynastic monuments. Both in political-strategic and broad geographical-topographical terms the mausolea occupied a liminal position on the divide between two worlds. First, the Djedars probably actually overlooked the old frontier highway – the *praetentura* – linking the former military bases and urban centres along the southern limit of the province. Although no milestones have yet been found between Aioun Sbiba and Columnata, the most likely route would take the road right past the Djedars. The road probably continued on from Columnata, following its previous, west-south-westerly course, 20km to Tiaret, where there the ruins of a sizeable, walled city with an inner citadel or reduced circuit and a rectangular fort were recorded by French military surveyors.¹⁷ Inscriptions, including one mentioning the dedication of a *pondarium* by an aedile, suggest this was the site of a Romanized *municipium* from the early third century AD.¹⁸ At Tiaret, the military highway must have changed course to reach the next known milestone, 45km to the south-south-west, near Aioun Sbiba.¹⁹ If it is assumed that the road followed the shortest practicable line projected between these two points, the highway will actually have passed right beneath the low bluffs of the Djebel Lakhdar and Djebel Araoui on which the Djedars were

¹⁵ G. Camps, 'Rex gentium Maurorum et Romanorum: Recherches sur le royaumes de Maurétanie des VI^e et VII^e siècles', *Ant. af.*, 20 (1984), pp. 207–8, figure 9; 'De Masuna à Koceila'. Les destinées de la Maurétanie aux VI^e et VII^e siècles', in S. Lancel (ed.), *Actes du II^e Colloque International sur l'Histoire et d'Archéologie de l'Afrique du Nord*, 1983 (Paris, 1985), pp. 307–25. *BCTH*, n.s. 19B (1985), pp. 316–7.

¹⁶ Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* (Paris, 1955), pp. 333–9; cf. Camps, 'Rex gentium Maurorum et Romanorum', pp. 215–16; 'De Masuna à Koceila', pp. 321–2.

¹⁷ Cf. Azema de Montgravier, 'Observations sur les antiquités militaires de la province d'Oran et en particulier sur les ruines de Tiaret', *Le Spectateur militaire*, 35 (1843) pp. 665–7, 675 and plan; R. L. V. Cagnat, *L'armée romaine d'Afrique et l'occupation militaire de l'Afrique sous les empereurs* (Paris, 1913, repr. New York, 1975), pp. 660–661; S. Fabre, 'Note sur la ville romaine de Tiaret', *BSGAO*, 20 (1900), plan; R. I. Lawless, 'Mauretania Caesariensis: An Archaeological and Geographical Survey' (unpubl. PhD, University of Durham, 1970), vol. 2, pp. 143–7.

¹⁸ *AE* (1912), no.156; cf. P. Cadenat, 'Notes d'archéologie tiarétienne', *Ant. af.*, 24 (1988), pp. 43–66.

¹⁹ P. Salama, 'Aioun Sbiba: Identification de la ville romaine', *Libyca*, 3 (1955), pp. 173–7.

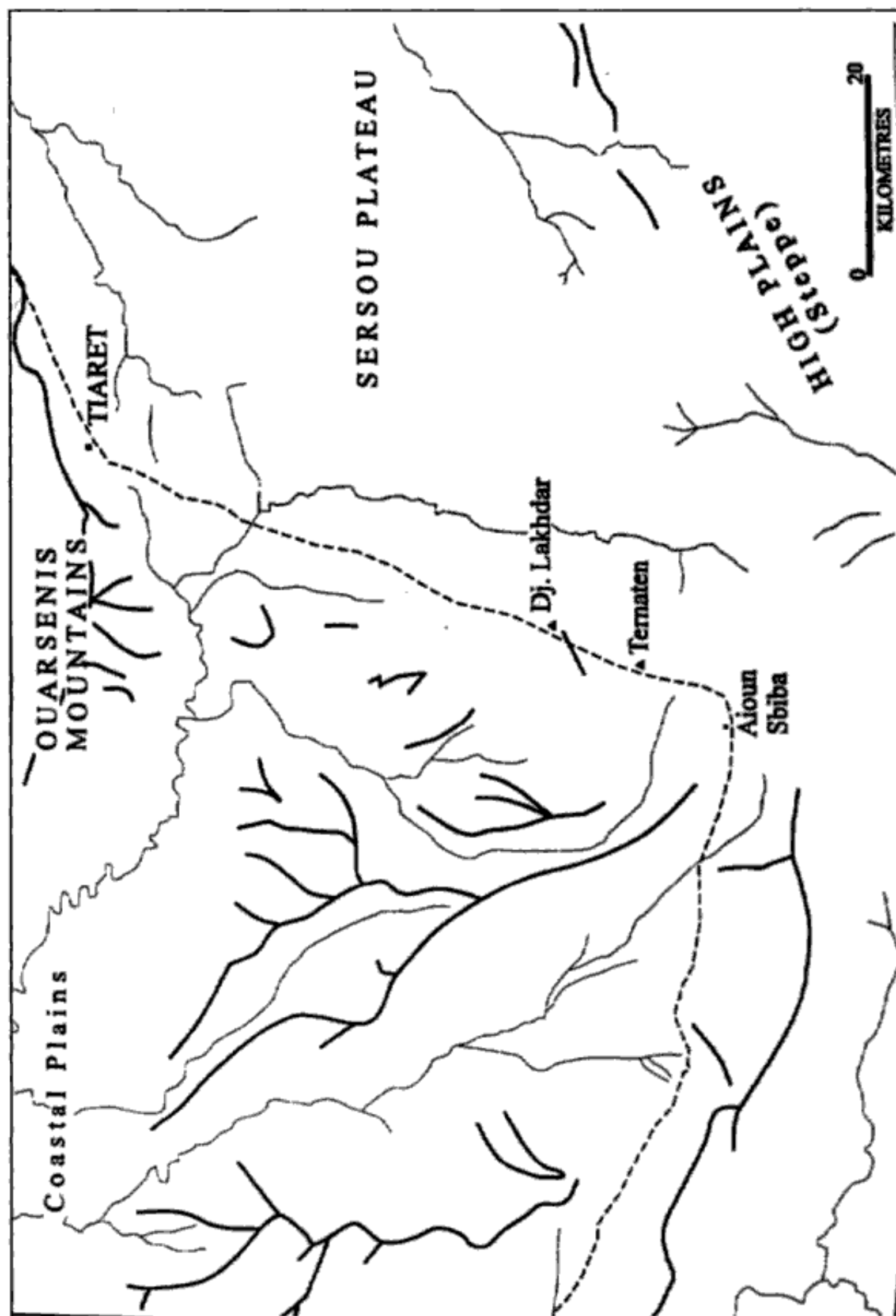


Figure 4.5 The location of the Djedars

situated. A trackway marked on the early twentieth-century, French colonial 1:200 000 series map follows this very route.

Second, the monuments were situated on the boundary between the mountainous watered zone – the Tell – and the high steppes. Moreover this part of the steppe, known as the Sersou Plateau, is unusually well-watered, being traversed by several watercourses, notably the Oued Mina and the Nahr Ouassel, which flow off the southern slopes of the adjacent Tell ranges, the Frenda and Ouarsenis Mountains. The Sersou thus acts as a fertile antechamber to the vast semi-arid expanse of the high plateaux stretching away to the south west, and south and east to the distant Saharan Atlas range. The area has witnessed much agricultural development based on extensive cereal cultivation in the twentieth century, and during Antiquity it is clear that the headwaters of the Mina and Nahr-Ouassel and the adjacent slopes of the Ouarsenis and Frenda mountains were densely settled.²⁰

If the royal mausolea on the Djebel Lakhdar and the Djebel Araoui lay close to the political centre of the successor state, alongside its principal artery, as might reasonably be supposed, so their liminal location must have important implications for the nature of that state.

DUAL STATES: *REGNUM GENTIUM MAURORUM ET ROMANORUM*

I have argued elsewhere that this and other late antique polities centred on the former North African frontier zone were so located because they functioned as ‘dual states’, a concept developed by Thomas Barfield in his detailed study of the dynamics of frontier interaction and post-imperial collapse in China and Inner Asia.²¹

Barfield argues that when Chinese imperial dynasties collapsed, the long-term beneficiaries were generally the tribes of Manchuria, to the north-east, which were able to establish successor states in the frontier zone. The key factor in the success of the Manchurian tribes was the essential experience their chieftains already possessed of ruling two different communities – their own nomadic tribes and groups of Chinese agricultural settlers along the coast and in the Liao-Tung

²⁰ Lt. Fort, ‘Les ruines romaines d’Ain Sbiba’, *BSGAO*, 28 (1908), pp. 21–36 and plates I–VII; ‘Notes pour servir à la restitution de la frontière romaine au sud de la Maurétanie Césarienne’, *BCTH* (1908), pp. 261–84 and plate xix; Gsell, *AAA*, 33; A. Joly, ‘Répartition et caractère des vestiges anciens dans l’Atlas tellien (Ouest Oranais) et dans les steppes oranaises et algézaïres’, *Revue africaine*, 53 (1909), pp. 5–19; ‘Ruines et vestiges anciens dans les provinces d’Alger et d’Oran’, *Revue africaine*, 54 (1910), pp. 393–404; Lawless, ‘*Mauretania Caesariensis*’; P. Salama, ‘Un point d’eau du limes maurétanien’, in *Maghreb et Sahara: Etudes géographiques offertes à Jean Despois* (Paris, 1973), pp. 339–49.

²¹ A. Rushworth, ‘From periphery to core in Late antique Mauretania’, in G. Fincham, G. J. Harrison, R. R. Holland and L. Revell (eds), *TRAC 99: Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference Durham 1999* (Oxford, 2000) pp. 96–8; T. J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic empires and China 221BC to 1757* (Oxford, 1989)

peninsula, between northern China proper and Korea. This enabled them to administer and tax Chinese districts they seized, rather than just raiding them, and eventually to establish parallel administrative hierarchies for the two populations – the tax-paying, agricultural Chinese and the northern tribes, which provided the military arm of the state. Moreover the Manchurian leadership was also conceptually equipped to take on the Inner Asian nomadic tribes and ultimately to dominate the Mongolian steppe in a way that the Chinese dynasties with their Confucian bureaucracies and rigid world view were not.²²

Similar processes underway in the North African frontier zone during late Antiquity may explain the siting of the Djedars. The location of the core of the state, which these monuments mark, on the territorial interface between two populations – the settled communities of provincial citizens, or *Romani*, and the Berber tribes along and beyond the frontier, the *Mauri* – seems designed to facilitate the control and exploitation of these twin human resources.

The citizenry of the former Roman provinces would have provided the fiscal resources of the new state and were subject to some kind of formal administration, as indicated by the existence of named officials on inscriptions found at Altava, Volubilis and Thanaramusa, which seem to relate either to this polity or a similar one centred further to the west.²³ The tribes beyond the frontier provided the military manpower. Control over the latter was probably exercised through the manipulation of kinship networks and the distribution of lucrative offices, honours and estates to key individuals. To adopt the vivid analogy used by Gellner to describe the early modern Moroccan state, the provincial *Romani* were the sheep to be shorn while the tribesmen were the sheepdogs who guarded the sheep and did the shearing.²⁴

These states were probably established by local Berber chieftains during the fifth century with the collapse of central authority in the western Maghreb. Moorish tribes and their chieftains had long been integrated into the processes of frontier control by the imperial authorities as allies, *foederati*, or military commanders.²⁵ A law of 409, preserved in the Theodosian Code, refers to the responsibilities of tribesmen (*gentiles*) in the defence and maintenance of the *limes* and *fossatum*.²⁶ Several chieftains buried in the Tripolitanian pre-desert cemetery of Bir ed-Dreder held the title of *tribunus* – either signifying tenure of a frontier command or simply an honorific title.²⁷ Moreover in 420–421 St Augustine refers to recently pacified

²² Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, pp. 104–24

²³ *CIL* VIII 9835; *IAM II* 506, 603; *AE* (1926), no. 60.

²⁴ E. A. Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London, 1969), pp. 3–4.

²⁵ A. Rushworth, 'Soldiers and Tribesmen: The Roman Army and Tribal Society in Late-Imperial Africa' (unpubl. PhD, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1992), pp. 27–59, 197–229.

²⁶ *C.Th.*, VII. 15.1; cf. Rushworth, 'Soldiers and Tribesmen', pp. 27–40.

²⁷ R. G. Goodchild, 'La necropoli Romano-Libica di Bir Ed-Dreder', *Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia*, 3 (1954), pp. 91–107 translated into English in J.M. Reynolds (ed.), *Libyan Studies: Select Papers of the late R. G. Goodchild* (London, 1976), pp. 59–71; cf. D.

tribes (*gentes pacatae*) now in the service of Rome.²⁸ The presence of a few Romanized communities among the Berber population of transhumant pastoralists-cum-terrace farmers in the high steppe and mountains to the south of the Mauretanian province will have provided the federate chieftains with some experience of maintaining authority over mixed populations.²⁹

It is generally accepted that many of the late antique successor states which emerged from the ruins of the Western Roman Empire feature some form of ethnic, functional duality. Indeed it seems implicit in the titulature of their rulers, as, for example, in the dedication erected at Altava, further west along the former frontier of Mauretania Caesariensis, in honour of Masuna, *rex gent(ium) Maur(orum) et Romanor(um)*.³⁰ In most cases, however, the new ethnic, military arm of the state – the ‘Goths’, or ‘Burgundians’ for instance – settled within the former boundaries of the Roman Empire, whereas the tribal sheepdogs in the Mauro-Roman kingdoms of North Africa continued to occupy a territorial zone beyond the former imperial frontiers which remained, to some extent at least, distinct from that of the *Romani*.

THE RUSTAMID STATE

The region of Tiaret retained its political importance in the centuries immediately following the Arab conquest.³¹ In 761 a new capital was founded at Tahart,³² c.10km south east of Tiaret, by the Ibadi imam, Abd al-Rahman ibn Rustam. The

J. Buck, J. R. Burns and D. J. Mattingly, ‘Archaeological Sites of the Bir Scedua Basin: Settlements and Cemeteries’, *Libyan Studies*, 14 (1983), pp. 42–54; D. J. Mattingly, ‘Libyans and the *limes*: Culture and Society in Roman Tripolitania’, *Ant. af.*, 23 (1987), pp. 85–8; Rushworth, ‘Soldiers and Tribesmen’, pp. 199–204.

²⁸ Augustine, *Ep.*, 199; cf. F. Decret, ‘Les *gentes barbarae* asservies par Rome dans l’Afrique du Ve siècle: Remarques d’Augustin d’Hippone sur un point d’histoire sociale et religieuse à la veille de l’invasion vandale’, *BCTH*, n.s. 19B (1985), pp. 265–71.

²⁹ R. I. Lawless, ‘The Lost Berber Villages of Eastern Morocco and Western Algeria’, *Man*, 7 (1972), pp. 114–21; ‘L’évolution du peuplement, de l’habitat et des paysages agraires au Maghreb’, *Annales de géographie*, 81(1972), pp. 451–64; Rushworth, ‘Soldiers and Tribesmen’, pp. 189–91; ‘From Periphery to Core’, p. 98.

³⁰ *CIL* VIII 9835; cf. P.A. Février, ‘Masuna et Masties’, *Ant. af.*, 24 (1988), p. 138.

³¹ In some very late sources for the Arab conquest, the fourteenth-century historians al Nuwayri and Ibn Khaldun, Tiaret is recorded the site of a battle in 683 between a combined force of Rum (probably Byzantine troops or perhaps Romano-Africans) and Moors on the one hand and the expeditionary force of Uqba ibn Nafi on the other, with the Arabs proving victorious. This is eminently plausible in the light of the evident prominence of the Tiaret region, discussed above, and the Arab commanders may well have directed strikes towards the capital(s) of the Moorish kingdoms. However, the reliability of such a late tradition remains highly questionable. cf. C.A. Julien, *History of North Africa: Tunisia - Algeria - Morocco. From the Arab Conquest to 1830*, ed. C.C. Stewart, tr. J. Petrie (London, 1970), pp. 8–10.

³² Gsell, *AAA* 33:13. Tahart has only received limited archaeological investigation; see G. Marçais and A. Dessus-Lamare, ‘Recherches d’archéologie musulmane: Tihert-Tagdempt’, *Revue africaine*, 90 (1946), pp. 24–57; and P. Cadenat, ‘Recherches à Tihert-Tagdempt, 1958–1959’, *Bulletin d’Archéologie algérienne*, 7 (1977–79), pp. 393–461.

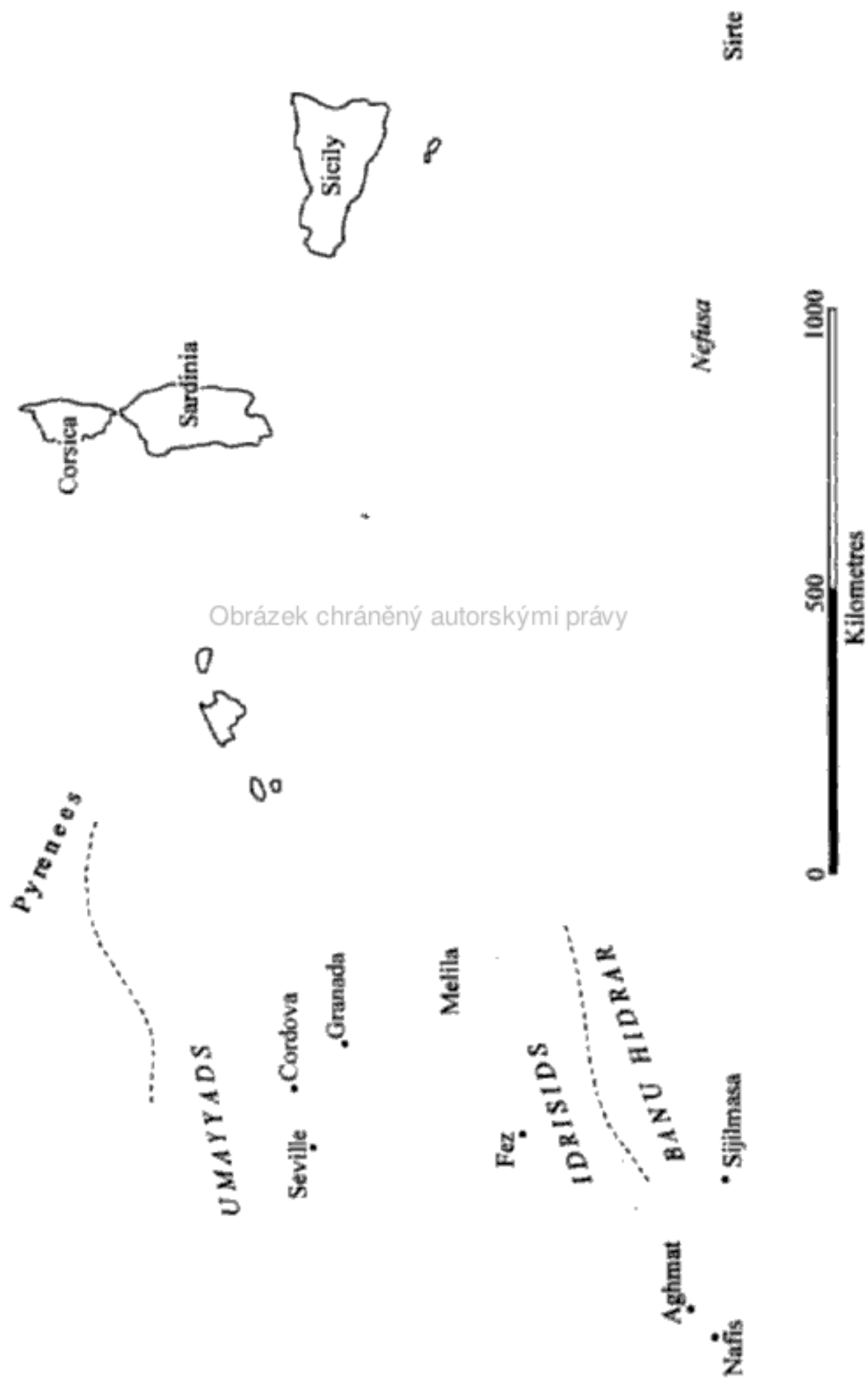


Figure 4.6 The Maghreb in the eighth-ninth centuries AD (after J. M. Abun Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 44)

Ibadis formed an austere Islamic sect which rejected the authority of the Umayyad and later the Abbasid caliphs. The prolonged upheaval in the Maghreb resulting from the Berber revolts against Arab caliphal rule in the mid-eighth century provided Ibn Rustam and his followers with the opportunity to establish an independent polity.

Territorially, this Rustamid state appears to be a rather a curious entity. Maps of the eighth- and ninth-century Maghreb produced by modern historians show the Rustamids controlling what is now central Algeria, acting as a buffer between Ifriqiya proper and the Idrisid state to the west, which was centred first on Volubilis and then on Fez. However they also depict the Rustamid polity sweeping round through the pre-Saharan zone as far eastward as the Tripolitanian Jebel (see Figure 4.6). As a result of the work of Elizabeth Savage, we now have a clearer idea of the internal workings of this state and the regime's main sources of support, which enable us to explain this unusual territorial layout.³³

Savage's analysis of the Ibadi sources suggests the imam did not so much rule or govern the surrounding tribes as preside over them, his authority being recognized rather than imposed and his mediation in disputes willingly sought. Ibn Rustam's successors, notably his son Abd al-Wahhab, and grandson, Aflah, sought to strengthen central authority and acquire more of the trappings of a state, and in doing so provoked a greater degree of resistance to their rule. Nevertheless, even at its height, Savage questions whether the imamate can properly be given the title of a state:

Rather the Imam's authority, specifically Abd al Wahhab's, was willingly accepted by the tribal federations. According to Ibn Saghir this extended all over the Maghreb, as far as the city of Tlemcen. A governor (*amil*) was elected locally and confirmed by the Imam. As representative of the Imam, the *amil* sent taxes and troops. However, local governors' authority was circumscribed by that of the tribal shaykhs.³⁴

Government, or leadership, by holy men, or marabouts, as they are known in the Maghreb, was a common feature of North African history until very recently. One might compare the holy lineages or 'saints' of the Zawiya Ahansel, which were studied by Ernest Gellner in the 1950s, and the role they perform amongst the tribes of the High Atlas.³⁵ The hereditary saints did not govern the surrounding Berber tribes, such as the mighty Ait Atta, in the modern sense of the term, although to external observers it might have appeared as though they did.³⁶ Instead they commanded great authority, performing a vital, mediatory, stabilizing function. It is interesting to compare the description of such 'maraboutic states' provided by the

³³ Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*.

³⁴ Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, pp. 56.

³⁵ Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*.

³⁶ cf. Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, p. 68.

brilliant French colonial anthropologist Robert Montagne with the analysis of the Rustamid state quoted above:

... all are based on the support of Berber communities independent of the central power. The religious leader thus appears as an arbitrator of local disputes and a benevolent protector of the mountain 'republics'. He respects their traditions and their customs, even those which are not in accord with the precepts of the Holy Book. He collects, without any difficulty, contributions which are freely offered him and rules by means of persuasion and skilful manoeuvres. His word is respected and feared because of the magic powers held by members of his lineage and because he has the power to bring the implacable curse of Allah upon the insubordinate.³⁷

A second significant source of support for the Rustamid regime can be identified in the shape of the Christian communities of the Maghreb. The evidence is discussed by Savage, who notes that a close association with Christian communities was a feature of the Ibadiya movement from its initial emergence in seventh-century Iraq.³⁸ The growth of a Christian community, known as the Majjana, at the capital, Tahart, itself, provided the imams with a stable counterweight to the shifting allegiances of tribal politics, and was on occasion turned to concrete military effect.³⁹

To understand the significance of such support it is important to recognize the degree to which Christianity was the dominant cultural force in late antique North Africa. Repeated surveys from the colonial archaeological atlases onwards have demonstrated both the extent and density of Christian monuments, bearing out the testimony of the episcopal notitia.⁴⁰ The notitia of 484 records no fewer than 467 sees in the African diocese.⁴¹ The profound impact of Christianity was felt not only in the cities and villages of the Tell, but also among Moorish tribal communities.⁴² Indeed, on the basis of a combination of historical, archaeological and lexicographical evidence, Camps has argued convincingly that the religion had spread beyond the limits of the former Roman provinces during the sixth-seventh

³⁷ R. Montagne, *Berbers*, p. 11

³⁸ Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, pp. 89–105

³⁹ A. de C. Motylinski (ed. and tr.), 'La chronique d'Ibn Saghir sur les imams rustumides de Tahert', *Actes du XIVe Congrès des Orientalistes* (Algiers, 1905), pp. 86, 99, 117–18.

⁴⁰ e.g. Gsell, *AAA*; cf. Gsell, *Les monuments*, vol. 2, pp. 113–343; 'La Christianisme en Oranie avant la conquête arabe', *BSGAO*, 48 (1928), pp. 17–32; A. Berthier, *Les Vestiges du Christianisme antique dans la Numidie centrale* (Algiers, 1942–43); J. B. Ward-Perkins and R. G. Goodchild, 'The Christian Antiquities of Tripolitania', *Archaeologia*, 95 (1953), pp. 1–83; P. Cadenat, 'Vestiges paléo-chrétien dans la région de Tiaret', *Libyca*, 5 (1957), pp. 77–103; P.-A. Février, 'Aux origines du christianisme en Maurétanie Césarienne', *MEFRA*, 98.2 (1986), pp. 767–809.

⁴¹ *Not. Prov.*

⁴² Rushworth, 'Soldiers and Tribesmen', pp. 193–4, 219–21; Augustine, *Ep.* 199 and cf. Decret, 'Les gentes barbarae asservies par Rome'; *CIL* VIII 21533; *CIL* VIII 9255 = *ILCV* 1822.

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Figure 4.7 The spread of Christianity: The Church of Khafagi Aamer in the Tripolitanian pre-desert (photo courtesy of J. N. Dore)

Imagem com direitos autorais

Figure 4.8 Khafagi Aamer: painted figure on wall plaster (photo courtesy of J. N. Dore)

centuries, extending deep into the pre-Saharan zone.⁴³ Thus the funerary stele at Djorf Torba, west of Bechar in south-west Algeria, contain painted figures apparently holding Latin crosses in a manner characteristic of Christian iconography of this period.

In these circumstances it is inherently likely that conversion from Christianity to Islam was a relatively slow process, as it was in other regions conquered by the Arabs in the seventh century.⁴⁴ This applies both to the more Romanized communities of the former African provinces and to the Moorish, or Berber, tribal groups. Christian communities, generally labelled *Afariqa* or *Ajam* in the Arab sources and speaking a Latin dialect (*al-li-san al-latini al-Afariq* as it is termed by al-Idrisi⁴⁵), are known to have survived in the Maghreb until the fourteenth century.⁴⁶ Gaining the support of these *Afariqa* was thus no trivial matter, particularly at the time of the Rustamid imamate's creation in the mid-eighth century. However, by the time the earliest Ibadi histories were compiled in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, shortly before the collapse of the regime, the numerical strength and self confidence of the African Church had probably begun to be significantly eroded, which context may in turn have influenced the history presented by sources such as Ibn Saghir.

Furthermore, throughout this period conversion to Islam may have been as much a political as a religious act. Depending on the circumstances it might signify either submission to the authority of the caliph and his representatives or the cementing of a coalition of diverse indigenous communities under Ibadi leadership to resist the depredations of the caliph's predominantly Arab forces. Such an alliance could derive inspiration or legitimacy from the Ibadi doctrine which proclaimed the equality of all believers, Arab or Berber, before God. This process might explain the

⁴³ Camps, *Rex gentium Maurorum et Romanorum*, pp. 208–15; 'De Masuna à Koceila', pp. 318–21.

⁴⁴ cf. R. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA, 1979).

⁴⁵ cf. T. Lewicki, 'Une langue romane oubliée de l'Afrique du Nord: observations d'un arabisant', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 17 (1951–3), pp. 415–80; J.-M. Lassere, 'Diffusion et persistance des traditions latines dans le Maghreb médiéval', in *La latinité, hier, aujourd'hui, demain* (Avignon, 1978), pp. 277–85; S. Lancel, 'La fin et la survie de la latinité en Afrique du Nord. État des questions', *Revue des études Latines*, 59 (1981), pp. 269–97.

⁴⁶ cf. C. Courtois, 'Grégoire VII et l'Afrique du Nord: Remarques sur les communautés chrétiennes d'Afrique du Nord au XIe siècle', *Revue historique*, 195 (1945), pp. 97–122 and 193–226; H.-R. Idriss, 'Fêtes chrétiennes célébrées en Ifriqiya à l'époque ziride', *Revue africaine*, 98 (1954), pp. 261–76; A. Mahjoubi, 'Nouveau témoignage épigraphique sur la communauté chrétienne de Kairouan au XIe siècle', *Africa*, 1 (1966), pp. 87–96; G. Gualandi, 'La presenza cristiana nell'Ifriqiya. L'area cimiteriale d'En Ngila', *Felix Ravenna*, 105–6 (1973), pp. 257–79; T. Lewicki, 'Une communauté chrétienne dans l'oasis de Ouargla au Xe siècle', in T. Lewicki, *Études Maghribines et Soudanaises*, 1. (Warsaw, 1976), pp. 79–90; C.-E. Dufourq, 'La coexistence des Chrétiens et des Musulmans dans Al-Andalus et dans la Maghrib au Xe siècle', in *Occident et Orient au Xe siècle. Actes du Congrès de Dijon, 1978* (Paris, 1979), pp. 209–34 and see also the discussion by Mark Handley in Chapter 14 of this volume.

growth of Ibadi communities in areas where there is also evidence for the persistence of Christianity.

The Ibadi sources naturally focus on the role of Ibn Rustam and his successors and, as Savage notes, are in part hagiographic rather than purely historical, presenting a retrospective, idealized view of these individuals and their deeds.⁴⁷ It seems inherently likely that these sources overstate the role of the imam *vis à vis* the other elements of what one might term the Rustamid coalition, namely the Berber tribes and settled, Christian agricultural communities of the pre-Saharan region, in the creation of the polity. Although the process cannot be reconstructed in any detail, much of the initiative may have come from these groups in actively selecting Ibadi leadership because it most closely fitted their requirements, providing a broad tolerant umbrella under which disparate North African communities could shelter.

AUTONOMY AND RESISTANCE IN PRE-SAHARAN TRIPOLITANIA

The unusual territorial extent of the Rustamid state has already been noted. The Rustamid imam was recognized as far away as the Tripolitanian pre-Sahara, notably by the communities of the Jebel Nefusa. The Nefusa embraced the Ibadi faith (and furthermore still do so), but Christianity also remained a feature of the region.⁴⁸ Indeed, it appears that Rustamid authority was recognized by communities throughout the pre-Saharan zone. By contrast, Ifriqiya proper – the coastal districts and the eastern Tell – remained under the control of the Abbasid caliph's nominal representative, the Aghlabid emirs at Kairouan. The latter were effectively successors to the Byzantine exarchs and Roman proconsuls.

Such opposition between coastal regions, or Tell, and pre-desert hinterland was not a new phenomenon in North African history. Perhaps the best known example is the resistance mounted by the Gaetulian tribal confederations, first to expansion by the Numidian kingdom and subsequently by the Roman state during the late Republic and early Principate.⁴⁹

By the late empire the peoples of the pre-desert had acquired a different label, 'Arzuges'.⁵⁰ This grouping figures in the writings of St Augustine and Orosius, where the term is used to denote the populations of the African frontier zone and in particular those dwelling along the southern margins of Tripolitana and Byzacena ('Arzugitana'). The label *Arzugi* first appears attached to the name of the legate of *legio III Augusta*, Comminius Cassianus, on a dedication the latter erected at

⁴⁷ Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, pp. 2, 9

⁴⁸ Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, pp. 103–6; R. Basset, 'Les sanctuaires du Djebel Nefousa', *Les Cahiers de Tunisie*, 29 (1981), pp. 434–4.

⁴⁹ cf. Daniels, 'The Frontiers: Africa', pp. 238–40; Fentress, *Numidia and the Roman Army*, pp. 64–8; D. J. Mattingly, *Tripolitania*, (London, 1995), pp. 70–73.

⁵⁰ cf. Goodchild, 'La necropoli Romano-Libica di Bir Ed-Dreder', pp. 35–7; Mattingly, *Tripolitania*, pp. 175–6; Rushworth, 'Soldiers and Tribesmen', p. 53.

Lambaesis in the 240s.⁵¹ It is noteworthy that the *regio limitis Tripolitanae* first appears as an officially designated administrative district around the same time and it is tempting to suggest that the term *Arzuges* was then adopted as an emblematic label describing the communities of this frontier zone, which had long fallen under the authority of the legate, in contrast to the Tripolitanian coastal cities which answered to the Proconsul in Carthage.

At any rate it is clear that the *Arzuges* represent the inhabitants of the frontier zone, not the tribes beyond the frontier, the very people who occupied in the *gasr* settlements which line the pre-desert wadis of Tripolitania and have been the subject of detailed study by the UNESCO Libyan Valleys Survey.⁵² Such administrative arrangements gave the pre-Saharan communities some independence from the control of the coastal urban elites, if not from wider Roman imperial domination. Even during the later empire, when the administration of Tripolitania was in theory unified under a single provincial governor who, unusually for the period, retained military authority, local control in the frontier zone (*limes*) was probably exercised by military officers rather than officials from the coastal cities. At least some of those officers may well have derived from the pre-desert elite, to judge from the titles, *tribuni*, figuring on the Latino-Punic inscribed funerary stele at Bir ed-Dreder.⁵³ Following the collapse of Roman imperial authority in North Africa during the fifth century, the communities of the Tripolitanian pre-desert recovered their autonomy. Subsequently neither the Vandal monarchy nor the East Roman exarchate appear to have re-established direct rule over the Tripolitanian hinterland.⁵⁴ Instead the communities of the pre-desert wadis and Jebel ranges may have been absorbed in a larger tribal confederation variously labelled the Laguatan, Levathae or, in the Arabic sources, Lawata.⁵⁵

The existence of labels such as *Gaetuli* and *Arzuges* thus reflects a longstanding and distinct sense of identity amongst the inhabitants of the pre-Saharan zone, which probably underwent a revival in late Antiquity. The support for the Ibadi movement shown by the communities of the Jebel Nefusa and the Jerid oases in the heart of former Arzugitana suggests that this regional sense of identity and consequent desire for autonomy were maintained into the early medieval period and acquired a new emblematic marker in the adoption of the Ibadi faith. Indeed Savage suggests that many of the 'tribal' groups which figure in the sources in this period, notably the Nefusa, may represent alliances of disparate communities which

⁵¹ *AE* (1989), no. 871, Y. Le Bohec, 'Inscriptions inédites ou corrigées concernant l'armée romaine d'Afrique', *Ant. af.*, 25 (1989), p. 202.

⁵² G. W. W. Barker, D. D. Gibertson, G. D. B. Jones, and D. J. Mattingly, *Farming the Desert: The UNESCO Libyan Valleys Archaeological Survey* (Paris/Tripoli/London, 1996).

⁵³ Rushworth, 'Soldiers and Tribesmen', pp. 199–204.

⁵⁴ Pringle, *The Defence of Byzantine Africa*, pp. 101–2; Mattingly, 'Libyans and the *Limes*', p. 92; *Tripolitania*, pp. 215–16.

⁵⁵ D. J. Mattingly, 'The Laguatan': A Libyan Tribal Confederation in the Late Roman Empire', *Libyan Studies*, 14 (1983), pp. 96–108.

Urheberrechtlich geschützte Abbildung

Figure 4.9 Gsur in the wadi Buzra (photo courtesy of J. N. Dore)

coalesced at this very time in response to the catalyst provided by the egalitarian Ibadi message and were retrospectively legitimized with a genealogical tribal framework.⁵⁶

LATE ANTIQUITY: DECLINE OR RENAISSANCE IN THE PRE-SAHARAN ZONE?

To conclude, the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, which has resulted in late Antiquity being viewed as a period of political decline, actually offered unprecedented opportunities for the communities of the pre-Saharan zone and their political elites, and may be seen as a period of renaissance in the region, at least in the political sphere.

From the fifth century onwards, the frontier districts of the African diocese were able to escape the control of authorities based in the coastal regions and re-establish their own polities. Some of these took the form of fully-fledged states which may have dominated adjacent regions of the Tell, while others perhaps constituted smaller chiefdoms or segmentary tribal confederations.

In the turbulent period following the Arab Conquest this pattern was maintained as the diverse communities of the pre-Sahara sought leadership, legitimized by adherence to some form of the new dominant cultural idiom, Islam, which nevertheless enabled them to defend their autonomy during the eighth and ninth centuries, from the depredations of the central power, the Arab rulers of Ifriqiya.

The Ibadi imans of Tahart successfully provided the required leadership, apparently imposing few exactions yet supplying vital mediation in inter-tribal conflicts which might otherwise have militated against effective resistance. Indeed they were sufficiently flexible to embrace elements from both the earlier traditions – the formally-organized, dual state in Mauretania Caesariensis centred on the region of Tiaret (the same focus selected by the Rustamids for their capital), and the autonomous communities of pre-Saharan zone further east, notably the Tripolitanian Jebel and pre-desert wadis. Their actual control over groups such as the Nefusa may have been very limited, but evidently the arrangement was sufficiently beneficial to both parties to endure.

It was not until the emergence of the Fatimid Caliphate in the tenth century that this pattern finally broke down. Nevertheless, its direct legacy can still be witnessed today, most notably in the continued adherence to the Ibadi strand of Islam on the part of the communities of the Jebel Nefusa, among whom it remains a crucial element of regional identity.

⁵⁶ Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, pp. 117–18, 129.

PART 2

WRITTEN CULTURE

Chapter 5

‘*Romuleis Libicisque Litteris*’: Fulgentius and the ‘Vandal Renaissance’¹

Gregory Hays

Fabius Planciades Fulgentius, generally (if inaccurately) referred to as Fulgentius ‘the Mythographer’, has left four extant works: allegorical commentaries on Greek myths (the *Mitologiae*) and on the *Aeneid* (the *Expositio Virgilianae Continentiae*); a short collection of glosses with illustrative quotations (the *Expositio Sermonum Antiquorum*); and a bizarre ‘lipogrammatic’ world-history (the *De aetatibus mundi et hominis*), originally in 23 books, of which only the first 14 survive.²

Fulgentius can profitably be studied in a diachronic perspective. The *Mitologiae*, *Continentia* and *Sermones* were widely read between the ninth and twelfth centuries, and the *Mitologiae* in particular played an important role in transmitting a knowledge of classical mythology to the Middle Ages. As an allegorist Fulgentius is part of a tradition that extends back to the fifth century BC and forward to the *Ovide moralisé*. Like Servius and Macrobius, he was an important link between ancient scholarship and medieval commentators.³ But as with any author, proper evaluation of his work also requires a synchronic view. To understand Fulgentius we must understand the historical and cultural context in which his works were written.

That this context is North African is suggested by the dedication of the *Mitologiae* to an otherwise unknown *Catus, presbyter Cartaginis*, and confirmed by two other passages. One is a reference to contemporary marauders who plant their *mauricatos ... gressus* in Fulgentius’ fields – pretty clearly the nomadic Mauri of

¹ I thank Andy Merrills for suggestions both on overall structure and on specific points. I am grateful also to participants in the Vandal Africa sessions at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, July 2003, whose papers and comments have helped shape the approach taken here.

² All citations are based on page and line number in R. Helm (ed.), *Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii V.C. Opera* (Leipzig, 1898), sometimes with adjustment of orthography and punctuation. For convenience I shall refer to the last three works as the *Continentia*, *Sermones* and *De aetatibus* with the corresponding abbreviations. Translations are my own.

³ cf. G. Hays, ‘Tales out of School: Grammatical Culture in Fulgentius the Mythographer’, in C. D. Lanham (ed.), *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric: From Classical Theory to Medieval Practice* (London, 2002), pp. 22–47.

the ancient Maghreb.⁴ The other is a passage in the preface to the *De aetatibus* in which Fulgentius refers to the 'Libyan' tongue as *nostra lingua*.⁵ Fulgentius' complimentary remarks about an unnamed *dominus rex* in the prologue to the *Mitologiae* encouraged scholars to place him somewhere in the Vandal period – under Gunthamund, perhaps, or Hilderic – and encouraged his identification with the bishop and anti-Arian controversialist Fulgentius of Ruspe.⁶ The second assumption has long been controversial. Both have now been called into question by the discovery that the preface to the *Mitologiae* borrows a line from Corippus's *Iohannis*.⁷ It now seems likely that Fulgentius was writing after 550 – not, perhaps, very long after, and in any event no later than 642.

We can say with certainty that Fulgentius is an African author. Whether that tells us anything useful about him is another question. A century ago scholars had no difficulty attributing the eccentricities of an African author's prose to his hot-blooded temperament or his alleged 'Semitic' background.⁸ Contemporary tolerance for such claims is understandably low. Equally unconvincing is the attribution to certain late Latin writers of a distinctive stylistic 'Africitas' or 'tumor Africanus'.⁹ In reality this allegedly 'African' style is not confined to Africa, nor is it found in all African authors. It is simply the late Latin version of the tradition of 'Asiatic' rhetoric that goes back to Gorgias and Isocrates. Fulgentius' ornate prose has much in common with that of compatriots like Apuleius and Martianus, but the same features can be found in the Italian Ennodius and the Gaulish Sidonius.

How far a Roman author's geographical background is relevant to the interpretation of his work is a debated question, and probably has no simple

⁴ *Mauricatus* here = wearing the *Maurica* (sc. *solea*) – a term attested at Corippus, *Ioh.*, 2.137. Cf. G. Hays, 'The Date and Identity of the Mythographer Fulgentius', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 13 (2003), pp. 245–7.

⁵ Fulg., *Aet.*, pref. p. 131.7ff.

⁶ For Gunthamund cf. R. Helm, 'Der Bischof Fulgentius und der Mythograph', *Rheinisches Museum*, 54 (1899), pp. 111–34; for Hilderic, see E. Jungmann, 'Quaestiones Fulgentianae', *Acta Societatis Philologiae Lipsiensis*, 1 (1871), pp. 45–54 and 'Die Zeit des Fulgentius', *Rheinisches Museum*, 32 (1877), pp. 564–77.

⁷ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 13.9: '*iam Phoebus disiungit equos, iam Quintia iungit*', Corippus, *Ioh.*, 8.279: '*tunc Phoebus disiunxit equos, tunc Cynthia iunxit*'. For the evidence that Fulgentius is the imitator see Hays, 'Date and Identity', pp. 241–3.

⁸ cf. for example, P. Monceaux, *Les Africains. Etude sur la littérature latine d'Afrique. Les Pâiens* (Paris, 1894), pp. 44–5.

⁹ The theory was first proposed by K. Sittl, *Die lokalen Verschiedenheiten der lateinischen Sprache mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des afrikanischen Lateins* (Erlangen, 1882, repr. Hildesheim, 1972) and ardently championed by E. Wölfflin in a series of articles in *Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie* and elsewhere. It was definitively refuted by W. Kroll, 'Das afrikanische Latein', *Rheinisches Museum*, 52 (1897), pp. 569–90. cf. also E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, 2d edn (Leipzig, 1909, repr. Stuttgart, 1958), pp. 588–98; E. Löfstedt, *Late Latin* (Oslo, 1959), p. 42; S. Lancel, 'Y a-t-il une Africitas?', *Revue des études latines*, 63 (1985), pp. 161–82; H. Petersmann, 'Gab es ein afrikanisches Latein?', in B. García-Hernández (ed.), *Estudios de lingüística latina* (Madrid, 1998), pp. 125–36.

answer.¹⁰ Local feeling may have differed from one era to another and from author to author, even within the same region.¹¹ Africa was an especially complicated case, embracing at least three languages and marked by clear cultural divisions between Romanized Carthage and the rural countryside. Under these circumstances, *Africitas* could hardly have been a stable concept. Some Africans tried to show themselves more Roman than the Romans: 'non sermo Poenus, non habitus tibi', Statius assures the African Septimius Severus, 'externa non mens: Italus, Italus'.¹² Apuleius' *Apology*, delivered before a Roman proconsul, stresses the author's credentials as a Roman intellectual against his rustic (Punic-speaking) accusers.¹³ But African intellectuals were willing to invoke the non-Roman side of their heritage when it suited them. Apuleius, in a lost speech, called himself 'half Numidian, half Gaetulan.' Fronto, comparing himself to the Scythian Anacharsis, implausibly claims to be a 'nomad of the Libyan nomads'.¹⁴ *Africitas* for them was a shifting construct, a status to be claimed for oneself or attributed to others as occasion demanded.

Fulgentius' expressions of cultural identity are equally problematic. The prologue to the *Mitologiae* sets up a distinction between the narrator and a less civilized Other: the *gentes* who burn his crops and the *barbari* who persecuted

¹⁰ cf. M. Bonjour, *Terre Natale. Etudes sur une composante affective du patriotisme romain* (Paris, 1975), esp. pp. 86-110; I. Gualandri, 'Persistenze e resistenze locali: un problema aperto', in G. Cavallo, P. Fedeli and A. Giardina (eds), *Lo spazio letterario di Roma antica* (Rome, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 509-29, especially the discussion of Africa at pp. 517-21.

¹¹ The case of Spain can serve as a useful illustration. The Spanish writers of the early empire – men like Pomponius Mela, Columella, the two Senecas, Lucan and Quintilian – spent most or all of their literary career in the *Urbs*. They may have felt a sentimental attachment to their native province and no doubt maintained links with their compatriots, but their works would not be much different if they had hailed from Cirta or Sulmo instead of Corduba or Calagurris: cf. M. Griffin, 'The Elder Seneca and Spain', *JRS*, 62 (1972), pp. 12-17. Martial's sense of Spanish identity seems more pronounced; cf. Bonjour, *Terre Natale*, pp. 211-18; J. P. Sullivan, *Martial. The Unexpected Classic* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 172-84. In the fifth and sixth centuries such feelings may have been reinforced by various factors, including the break-up of the Western Empire, and the growth of localized saints' cults. Thus scholars have discerned in Prudentius a consciously 'Spanish' identity that we do not find in (say) Lucan: cf. J. Fontaine, 'Romanité et hispanité dans la littérature hispano-romaine des IV^e et V^e siècles', in his *Etudes sur la poésie latine tardive d'Ausone à Prudence* (Paris, 1980), pp. 309-30. Yet these same factors could reinforce the sense of *Romanitas* as well as diminishing it: cf. F. Paschoud, *Roma Aeterna* (Rome, 1967). Here again, there is no generalizing.

¹² Stat., *Silv.*, 4.5.45f.

¹³ S. J. Harrison, *Apuleius. A Latin Sophist* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 39-88, esp. 46.

¹⁴ Apul. *Apol.* 24: *memet professus sum . . . Seminumidam et Semigaetulum*; Fronto M.P.J. van den Hout, (ed) *M. Cornelius Fronto, Epistulae* (Leipzig, 1988) p. 24.9: Αἰβύς τῶν Αἰβύων τῶν νομάδων. On the 'provincial patriotism' of these two authors see N. Méthy, 'Fronton et Apulée: Romains ou Africains?', *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale*, 25 (1983), pp. 37-47 and compare Mart. 10.65.3f, who describes himself as: *ex Hiberis|et Celtis genitus Tagique civis*.

letters back in the old days.¹⁵ But not being a barbarian does not necessarily make one a Roman. When the Vergil of the *Continentia* proposes to initiate Fulgentius into the mystic secrets of his poetry, the latter responds: '*Serva ista, quaeso, tuis Romanis*' (*Cont.* p.86.10). If we ask what term Fulgentius would have used to describe himself, the most likely answer is *Libycus*. This, at any rate, is the word that recurs in the preface to the *De aetatibus*:

... et penes Grecos licet in litteris vertere ... quod penes Libicos invenitur illicitum.¹⁶

... and among the Greeks it is permissible to substitute one letter for another, a thing not permitted to Libyans.

[...]

Viginti igitur et duobus elementis penes Hebreos ordo loquendi disponitur, uno itidem superiecto nostre lingue profusio, sed et Romulee¹⁷ colligitur ...; oportet deinceps nostre lingue medium ordinem consequi, quo ... unicus ordo Libico monstretur in numero.¹⁸

For the Hebrews, expression is embodied in twenty-two letters, the utterances of our own tongue (but also that of the Romans) comprehended by the addition of one more ...; it is proper, then, to follow the intermediate (sc. between Hebrew and Greek) order of our own tongue, so that ... the arrangement proper to the Libyan alphabet is obtained.

[...]

si ... Romuleis Libicisque litteris orientis iungendum duxeris conputum ...¹⁹

if ... you think the eastern calculation is to be applied to the Roman and Libyan alphabet...

Libycus here has been taken to mean the native language thought by some to be the ancestor of modern Berber, whose extant remains are inscribed using 'twenty-three signs of a rather rigid geometrical form'.²⁰ At first glance, the passage thus seems to imply a rather remarkable assertion of African identity, as distinct from Roman.

But should we take this assertion any more seriously than we do Fronto's claim to be a 'Libyan nomad'?²¹ Fulgentius' apparent tribute to the Libyan alphabet notwithstanding, the *De aetatibus* is written in Latin, not 'Libyan', and it is the 23 letters of the Latin alphabet that govern the work. Moreover, it should be recalled

¹⁵ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 5.10: '*agrorum ... dominium gentes ceperant, nos domorum*'; p. 9.19 (Calliope speaks): '*non paves ... Musicum tuis receptare dogma penatibus, cum barbarorum morem auscultaverim ita litterarios mercatos penitus abdicare, ut hos qui primis elementorum figuris vel proprium discripserint nomen ... in carnificina reptarent?*'

¹⁶ Fulg., *Aet.*, pref. p. 130.24ff.

¹⁷ *Romae* MSS. Helm prints Plasberg's *Romanae*, which is impossible; neither Helm nor Plasberg realized that the preface, as well as the first book, omits the letter A. *Romulee* is conjectured in the margin of the copy of Helm in the library of the *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*; cf. p. 132.9: *Romuleis Libicisque litteris*.

¹⁸ Fulg., *Aet.*, pref. p. 131.5ff.

¹⁹ Fulg., *Aet.*, pref. p. 132.6.

²⁰ F. Millar, 'Local Cultures in the Roman Empire: Libyan, Punic and Latin in Roman Africa', *JRS*, 58, parts 1 and 2 (1968), p. 129.

²¹ Contrast C. Stöcker, 'Alexander der Grosse bei Fulgentius und die Historia Alexandri Macedonis des Antidamas', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 33 (1979), p. 55, n. 4 who takes it for granted that 'er nicht in seiner Muttersprache schreibt.'

that the *De aetatibus* is written in 'lipogrammatic' form, which in the Preface, as in the first book, prohibits the use of the letter A. It may be that Fulgentius' use of *Libycus* is driven less by local patriotism than by his need to avoid the forbidden adjective *Latinus*. The phrase *Romuleis Libicisque litteris* may signify simply 'the language spoken alike by Romans and Africans' – that is to say, Latin.

For further insight into Fulgentius' *Africitas*, we might ask how far his work reflects the reality of North African life. The answer is 'hardly at all'. The best prospect for contemporary references is the preface to the *Mitologiae*. Here the author describes his retirement from the noise and alarums of the city to a country estate, where his hopes of peace and quiet are dashed by the equally unwelcome visits of tax collectors and marauders, until at last the opportune appearance of an unnamed *dominus rex* improves matters. The city whose noise and bustle Fulgentius flees is never named, while the *dominus rex* whose advent is hailed so enthusiastically remains unidentified. Fulgentius' vagueness here is not accidental. It is part and parcel of his aesthetic, which is based on stylization and convention. The *dominus rex*, as well as the marauders and tax collectors, inhabit the world of panegyric. Fulgentius' withdrawal from the city evokes the time-honoured motif of the poet's *secessio* and the statesman's retirement from public life.²² His descriptions of landscape echo the fantasy world of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.²³ The scene culminates in a purely conventional *locus amoenus* with shady tree and sweetly trilling birds, whose ultimate roots lie not in Libya but in the Greece of Plato's *Phaedrus*.²⁴

The search for African references proves even less fruitful in the remainder of the corpus. The gods allegorized in the *Mitologiae* are those of art and literature, not cult. Fulgentius' chapter on Saturn contains no hint of 'Saturne Africain', the Romanized incarnation of the Punic god Ba'al, who looms so large in the African Arnobius' treatise *Adversus Nationes*.²⁵ Similarly the two discussions of Juno²⁶ make no allusion to the Iuno Caelestis who conceals the native goddess Tanit.²⁷ The same holds true for other deities prominent in pagan Carthage, such as Pluto, Ceres, and Liber.

²² Poetic *secessio*: Hor., *Epist.*, 2.2.77f.; Ov., *Tr.*, 1.1.41; Tac., *Dial.*, 9.6 (cf. 12.1 and Pliny, *Ep.* 9.10.2 with the note provided by A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny* (Oxford, 1966)); Plin. *Ep.* 1.9.6 Dio Chrys., 20.11; R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace Odes*, Book 1 (Oxford, 1970) on Hor. *Carm.* 1.1.32; A. Giordano Rampioni, *Sulpiciae conquestio* (ep. Bob. 37) (Bologna, 1982) on Sulpicia, *Sat.*, 3; H. Riikonen, 'The Attitude of Roman Poets and Orators to the Countryside as a Place for Creative Work', *Arctos*, 10 (1976), pp. 75–85. Retirement from public life: Cic., *Tusc.*, 1.1.

²³ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 6.15: 'dum ... roscidos florulenti velleris colles spatianti meterem passu'; Apul., *Met.*, 1.2.2: 'postquam ... lubrica vallium et roscida caespitum ... emersimus'. (Fulgentius' *florulenti* looks to *Pervigilium Veneris* 19 *florulentae* ... *purpurae*).

²⁴ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 6.18ff.: 'Devertor arborei beneficium umbraculi praesumens ... nam me avium quaedam vernulitas ... ad hoc opus [sc. the inset poem that follows] allexerat'.

²⁵ M. Leglay, *Saturne Africain. Histoire* (Paris, 1966); J. B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 142–50; M. B. Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 184–215.

²⁶ Fulg., *Mit.*, 1.3 p. 18.14ff. and 2.1 p. 38.15ff.

²⁷ On whom see Rives, *Religion and Authority*, pp. 162–69.

Fulgentius includes several myths with African settings, but never with any sense of proprietary interest. The story of Perseus and Medusa cites Ovid and Lucan as sources, but ignores the Libyan setting that features prominently in both authors.²⁸ The Carthaginian queen Dido has only a walk-on role in the *Continentia*, not as the chaste anti-Vergilian Dido defended by some earlier African authors but as the abstract incarnation of *libido*.²⁹ Hercules' encounter with Antaeus traditionally took place in North Africa, and Antaeus had been venerated as a hero by earlier generations of Africans.³⁰ But one would never know it from Fulgentius's account, which (as elsewhere in the *Mitologiae*) strips away any specificity of place in order to emphasize the story's abstract, universal meaning – in this case as an allegory of Virtue triumphant over Lust.³¹

A few casual references may hint at North African *Realien*. As the inventor of the chariot, Erichthonius is the father of the circus, '*ubi invidiae semper certamen est*'. Hence the Fulgentian etymology of his name from Greek *eris* = *certamen*, and *tonos* (*sic*) = *invidia*.³² Is this a faint reminiscence of the chariot-races in the circus at Carthage which were so popular as a subject for the art and poetry of late antique North Africa?³³ Perhaps, though chariot-racing was hardly confined to North Africa. A passage in the Ceres chapter makes reference to the *dies lampadarum* – apparently a midsummer festival attested in other sources, of which some or all may be of North African provenance.³⁴ But the local reference here – if that is what it is – is very much the exception. The historian who delves into Fulgentius for details of late antique African life will find the search an unrewarding one.

²⁸ Fulg., *Mit.*, 1.21 p. 32.4; cf. Ov., *Met.*, 4.617ff.; Luc., 9.629ff.

²⁹ C. Pascal, 'Didone nella letteratura latina d'Africa', *Athenaeum*, 5 (1917), pp. 285–93.

³⁰ Mela, 3.10; Strabo, 17.3.8; Plut., *Vit. Sert.*, 9.

³¹ Fulg., *Mit.*, 2.4.

³² Fulg., *Mit.*, 2.11, p. 51.19–20.

³³ cf. K. M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 88–108; S. T. Stevens, 'The Circus Poems in the Latin Anthology', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *The Circus and a Byzantine Cemetery at Carthage* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 153–78.

³⁴ Fulg., *Mit.*, 1.11 p. 22.19: '*lampadarum dies Cereri dedicatus est ... quod hoc tempore cum lampadibus, id est cum solis fervore, seges ad metendum cum gaudio requiratur*'. Ps. Chrysost., *De solstit.*, B. Botte (ed.), *Les origines de la Noël et de l'Épiphanie* (Louvain, 1932), l. 258: '*solstitium ... quem diem lampadem appellant*'; ibid. l. 415: '*octavo calendas iulias quem lampadem appellant quo tempore messis tritici caeditur*'; Ps. Fulg., *Serm.*, 56, J.-P. Migne (ed.), PL, 65 (Paris, 1865): '*Si vultis recta lingua vocare diem lampadarum, diligite Spiritum sanctum: sed ... sunt multi qui diem vocant lampadam, et sunt in medio tenebrarum*'; AL R.395.23 (S.391.23) (June): '*lampas maturas Cereris designat aristas*'. On this last see further H. Stern, *Le calendrier de 354* (Paris, 1953), pp. 253–7; E. Courtney, 'The Roman Months in Art and Literature', *Museum Helveticum*, 45 (1988), p. 48f (defending *lampas*). Stern connects the *dies lampadarum* with a feast mentioned by Diod. Sic., 5.4.5 commemorating the return of Persephone from the underworld. That the term simply designates the solstice, rather than an actual festival involving torches is argued by M. R. Salzman, *On Roman Time. The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA., 1990), p. 92f. with n. 144. But the plural *lampadarum* is difficult to account for on this reading, and the polemical tone of Ps. Chrysostom and Ps. Fulgentius suggests that more is at issue.

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If Fulgentius can be said to have an African identity at all, it is not racial, cultural or linguistic in nature, but literary – an identity shaped not under the blazing heat of 'le sol africain' but by the midnight oil of the study. Writers, after all, are the product of their reading, and this is certainly true of Fulgentius. His own library is smaller than he would like us to think.³⁵ But among the authors he is likely to have known first hand, one group is disproportionately represented. These are African authors, more specifically the secular writers of the Vandal and early Byzantine periods.³⁶ It is against this background that Fulgentius' works should be read.

In what follows I shall begin by laying out the individual links between Fulgentius and these writers: echoes, allusions and similarities of taste. I shall then step back to examine some general features shared by the group as a whole.

Martianus Capella

Perhaps the earliest of these authors (though his exact date remains controversial) is Martianus Capella.³⁷ Fulgentius and Martianus are linked, first of all, by a shared admiration for Apuleius, perhaps the most influential of all African authors, and one whose fame in Africa itself is confirmed by fourth century references.³⁸ Fulgentius' direct use of Apuleius is obvious to any reader and has never been questioned. The opening page of the *Mitologiae* includes clear echoes of the preface to the

³⁵ This is not the place to go into the vexed question of Fulgentius' citations. For opposing views, see G. Pennisi, *Fulgenzio e la 'Expositio Sermonum Antiquorum'* (Florence, 1963), pp. 99–200; B. Baldwin, 'Fulgentius and his Sources', *Traditio*, 44 (1988), pp. 37–57. More cautious and reliable than either is U. Pizzani, *Fabio Planciade Fulgenzio. Definizione di Parole Antiche* (Rome, 1968), pp. 5–17.

³⁶ For discussions of literary and cultural life under the Vandals cf. Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 228 n. 6; F. Bertini, *Autori latini in Africa sotto la dominazione vandalica* (Genova, 1974); P. Langlois in J. Fontaine, S. Lancel, P. Langlois and A. Mandouze, 'Africa II. (literaturgeschichtlich)', in T. Klauser et al. (eds), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Suppl. 1, (1985), pp. 201ff.; F. M. Clover, 'Carthage and the Vandals', in J. H. Humphrey, (ed.), *Excavations at Carthage 1978*, conducted by the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI, 1982), vol. 7 pp. 1–22 and the discussion by George in the Chapter 6 of the present volume. For the early Byzantine period cf. A. Cameron, 'Byzantine Africa: the Literary Evidence', in Humphrey (ed.), *Excavations at Carthage 1978*, vol. 7, pp. 29–62.

³⁷ Martianus has often been dated between 410 and 439, but on quite insubstantial grounds. A. Cameron, 'Martianus and his First Editor', *Classical Philology*, 81 (1986), pp. 320–28 attempts to make a more reasoned case for an early dating. Other recent studies lean toward the late fifth or even early sixth century: cf. D. Shanzer, *A Philosophical and Literary Commentary on Martianus Capella's De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii Book 1* (Berkeley, CA, 1986), pp. 5–28; S. J. B. Barnish, 'Martianus Capella and Rome in the Late Fifth Century', *Hermes*, 114 (1986), pp. 98–111; S. Grebe, 'Gedanken zur Datierung von *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* des Martianus Capella', *Hermes*, 128 (2000), pp. 353–68.

³⁸ Augustine, *Ep.* 138.19: 'Apuleius, ... qui nobis Afris Afer est notior'; Apuleius' Africanness is stressed also by *Hist. Aug.*, *Clod. Alb.*, 12.12: *Milesias Punicas Apulei*.

Metamorphoses. The Cupid and Psyche story is included in the *Mitologiae* (*Mit.* 3.6), and the novel is also quoted in the *Sermones* (17; 36; 40), along with the lost *Hermagoras* (3) and an unidentified work 'de re publica' (44).³⁹ Apuleius is often cited as a major (even the primary) influence on Fulgentius' extravagant prose style. But he also anticipates important aspects of Fulgentius' literary persona: his ostentatious bilingualism,⁴⁰ pretensions to encyclopaedic culture,⁴¹ and flirtation with demonology and other occult matters.⁴² These same qualities had already attracted Martianus, whose *mise-en-scène* in the first two books of the *De nuptiis* owes much to the Cupid and Psyche episode in particular.

But the connection between the two authors is based on more than just shared reading. Fulgentius in fact provides the first known attestation of the *De nuptiis*, citing a sentence from *Nupt.* 1.5 (in somewhat garbled form) at *Serm.* 45 p.123.3ff. Even without this citation, Martianean influence on the preface to the *Mitologiae* would still have been palpable. Fulgentius' elaborate descriptions of allegorical figures, and mixture of the serious and comic clearly recall the frame narrative of the *De nuptiis*.⁴³ His baroque prose has been described as 'redolent of all the Capellan mannerisms carried to an extreme'.⁴⁴ The influence of Apuleius on both

³⁹ A forthcoming study of Apuleius' *Nachleben* by Julia Gaisser will explore this question further.

⁴⁰ Apuleius boasts at *Flor.*, 9 of his ability to declaim '*tam graece quam latine, gemino voto, pari studio, simili stilo*' cf. *Flor.*, 18: '*vox mea utraque lingua iam vestris auribus ... probe cognita*'. Later authors duly emphasized this accomplishment: cf. Augustine, *De Civ Dei.*, 8.12: '*in utraque ... lingua, id est et graeca et latina, Apuleius Afer extitit Platonius nobilis*'. On the actual knowledge of Greek in North Africa see T. Kotula, 'Utraque lingua eruditi', in *Hommages à Marcel Renard* (Brussels, 1969), vol 2, pp. 386–92, against the more optimistic view of W. Thieling, *Der Hellenismus in Kleinafrika* (Leipzig, 1911), pp. 150–78. The mythographer quotes Greek regularly, but the real extent of his knowledge has been debated; cf. P. Courcelle, *Les lettres grecques en occident de Macrobe à Cassiodore* (Paris, 1948), pp. 206–209, who is perhaps too sceptical. But in this context it is the claim to bilingualism that matters, not the reality.

⁴¹ For Apuleian encyclopedism cf. Harrison, *Apuleius*, pp. 36–38. Fulgentius goes out of his way to include material on the reproductive habits of ravens (*Mit.* 1.13 p. 24.2ff. with a citation from Petronius), the sexual habits of bivalves (*Mit.* 2.1 p. 40.21ff., citing Juba), and a poultice designed to produce erections (*Mit.* 3.7 p. 71.17ff. citing Julius Africanus). He claims elsewhere to have written a 'physiological work' including material '*et de septenario et de novenario numero*' (*Cont.* p. 91.21ff.). The work does not survive, but I see no reason to doubt that it existed. The significance of the numbers seven and nine in medicine (and other areas) is well attested; cf. W. H. Roscher, 'Die enneadischen und hebdomadischen Fristen und Wochen der ältesten Griechen', *Abhandlungen der königl. Sächs. Gesellschaft. Philologisch-historische Klasse*, 21.4 (Leipzig, 1903) and 'Die Sieben und Neunzahl im Kultus und Mythos der Griechen', *Abhandlungen der königl. Sächs. Gesellschaft. Philologisch-historische Klasse*, 24.1 (Leipzig, 1904), pp. 94–96.

⁴² cf. Fulg., *Cont.*, p. 86.2 where Fulgentius's virtuous disclaimer of all interest in the occult manages simultaneously to showcase his familiarity with demonological authorities: '*Dardanus in dinameris aut Battiades in paredris aut Campester in catabolicis infernalibusque ...*'

⁴³ cf. B. Pabst, *Prosimetrum* (Cologne, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 134–49.

⁴⁴ Shanzer, *Philosophical and Literary Commentary*, p. 13.

authors might account for some of the similarities, but specific lexical borrowings put Martiane influence beyond doubt.⁴⁵ There are also structural similarities. Fulgentius' preface consists of two scenes: a daytime outdoor 'poetic' epiphany followed by a night-time indoor 'apocalyptic' epiphany, with a hexameter description of nightfall separating them. It thus recapitulates in briefer compass the pattern of Martianus' Books I–II, which are similarly articulated by a verse description of nightfall at the opening of Book II. Just as Philologia's vigil is interrupted by the sudden entrance of her mother Phronesis (*Nupt.* 2.114: '*secretum cubiculi repente Phronesis ... irrupit*') so Fulgentius' authorial labours are interrupted when Calliope suddenly bursts through the door (*Mit.* pref. p. 13.20: '*cubicularias ... fores inrupit*').⁴⁶

Dracontius

A second author certainly known to Fulgentius is Blossius Aemilius Dracontius, who wrote his masterpiece, the *De laudibus Dei*, while imprisoned by the Vandal monarch Gunthamund.⁴⁷ Rudolf Helm suggested that a passage in the prologue to the *Mitologiae* might even be an allusion to Dracontius' imprisonment:

Itaque meis quo deverteret culminibus inpetravi. Tum illa: Non paves, inquit, Musicum tuis receptare dogma penatibus, cum barbarorum morem auscultaverim ita litterarios mercados penitus abdicare, ut hos qui primis elementorum figuris vel proprium discripserint nomen cassata inquisitione†mutum in carnificina reptarent. Tum ego: Non ita est, inquam, ut 'audieras, sed fama fuit.' ... Nunc itaque ita litterae suos [...] quicquid Elicon verbalibus horreis entecatum possederat in ipsis potestatum culminibus hereditario iure transferret.⁴⁸

Then I implored her to take shelter under my roof. She said, 'are you not afraid to harbour the teachings of the Muses in your house, when I have heard that it is the barbarians' nature to disdain literary transactions so completely that those who can trace even their own name with the rudimentary shapes of letters they hale off [without even a hearing] to execution?' I replied, 'it is not as you have heard, but it was just a rumour.' ... Now letters [have extended their influence so far that] whatever Helicon had kept hoarded in its verbal storehouses it has transferred to the houses of our rulers by hereditary right.

⁴⁵ Fulg., *Mit.*, pref. p. 6.8: '*intercapedinante ... prolixitate*' (cf. Mart. Cap., 9, 921: '*intercapedinatae prolixitatis*'); ibid. p. 11.7: '*garrulantes ineptias*' (cf. Mart. Cap., 1.2: '*mugulas ineptas aggarrire*'); *Cont.*, p. 86.7: '*creperum ... desipere*' (cf. Mart. Cap., 1.2: '*creperum sapis*'); *Serm.*, 19 p. 117.10: *adgarrire* (elsewhere only at Mart. Cap., 1.2); *Aet.*, 2 p. 137.2: *turgore* (elsewhere only at Mart. Cap., 2.135; 5.566 and in the glossaries); *Aet.*, 7 p. 150.23: *marcidulis* (elsewhere only at Mart. Cap., 7.727). Less certain examples: *hyalinus* 'made of glass' (*Mit.*, pref. 14.11; this sense elsewhere only at Mart. Cap., 6.575); '*consonantia et aequali ... iugalitate*' (*Aet.*, 2 p. 137.8; cf. Mart. Cap., 2.108: '*consentanea ... congruit iugitate*'); *adsecutor* (*Aet.*, 8 p. 159.9; elsewhere only at Mart. Cap., 9.905, though in a different sense). Martianus is the only other Latin source for some of the musical vocabulary in *Mit.*, 3.9 and 10 (e.g. *melopoia*; *elatio*), though a Greek source is also possible.

⁴⁶ This last detail is not uncommon in epiphanies; see my forthcoming commentary *ad loc.*

⁴⁷ See Merrills, Chapter 7 of the present volume.

⁴⁸ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 9.18. cf. Helm, 'Der Bischof Fulgentius', p. 125f.

Despite Helm's claims, it is far from certain that Dracontius is the *hos* referred to here. Fortunately, the case for Fulgentius' knowledge of Dracontius does not rest on this passage alone. More reliable indications are specific borrowings that appear in the *De aetatibus*.⁴⁹ Thus Fulgentius' *bon mot* on the incestuous Semiramis ('*sibi nurus effecta est*') echoes Dracontius' formulation, '*sibi socrus erat*' (*De Laud.*, 3.499). An even more compelling parallel is Fulgentius' description of Noah's ark at *Aet.* 2 p. 136.5: '*enatat futuri mundi seminalis entheca praeteritae nationis reliquias futuro saeculo productura*'. Compare Dracontius, *De laud.*, 2.391ff.:

enatat inter aquas cum *mundi* civibus arca,
conceptu paritura simul iuvenesque senesque
et pueros matresque pias tenerasque puellas.
Una dies *produxit* avum serosque nepotes.

There are also possible echoes of Dracontius in Fulgentius' treatment of the Judith story, though the avoidance of the letter 'I' in Book 9 of the *De aetatibus* disguises any common phrasing. It seems clear in any event that Fulgentius had read at least the *De laudibus* with attention. Whether he knew the *Romulea* or the *Satisfactio* remains uncertain.

The Latin Anthology

In addition to direct links with Martianus and Dracontius, Fulgentius also shows strong affinities with poets of the so-called *Latin Anthology*.⁵⁰ This rather misleading term designates a Vandal-era poetic collection of which large portions are preserved in several manuscripts. Of these the best-known is Paris BN lat. 10318 (A), the so-called 'Codex Salmasianus', a late eighth-early ninth-century miscellany from central Italy.⁵¹ The original Vandal-era anthology probably included not only the poems preserved in this manuscript, but others found in two later manuscripts, Leiden, Voss. lat. Q 86 (V) and Paris BN lat. 8071 (B), whose contents overlap with but do not exactly duplicate those of A. (Modern editors have

⁴⁹ Helm, 'Der Bischof Fulgentius', pp. 117–19. Not all his parallels are equally compelling; Vollmer's edition of Dracontius accepts only the ark passage. cf. also D. Romano, *Studi Draconziani* (Palermo, 1959), pp. 85–7; Claude Moussy and Colette Camus (ed. and tr.), *Dracontius. Œuvres*. Tome I (Paris, 1985), p. 99.

⁵⁰ The basic edition is that of A. Riese (ed.), *Anthologia Latina*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1894–1906); D. R. Shackleton Bailey, (ed.) *Anthologia Latina* 1.1 (Stuttgart, 1982) offers an improved text (followed here unless otherwise noted), but omits a number of poems for no good reason. For a succinct and up-to-date summary of the manuscript situation cf. R. J. Tarrant, 'Anthologia Latina', in L. D. Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmission* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 9–13. On the compilation question cf. the (uncritical) summary of previous views at M. Rosenblum, *Luxorius. A Latin Poet among the Vandals* (New York and London, 1961), pp. 25–35.

⁵¹ M. Spallone, 'Il Par. Lat. 10318 (Salmasiano): Dal manoscritto alto-medievale ad una raccolta enciclopedica tardo-antica', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 25 (1982), pp. 1–71.

worsened an already confusing situation by publishing under the title ‘*Anthologia Latina*’ not only these poems but others found in other, unrelated manuscripts).

The collection preserves the work of ten or so Vandal-era poets, notably Luxorius and (if he belongs to his period) Reposianus.⁵² It also includes earlier African texts such as the second-century (?) Virgilian cento of Hosidius Geta and the poems of Pentadius, as well as other material not of African origin (epigrams attributed to Seneca, for example, and brief snatches of Propertius). But even these pieces are significant as evidence for the literary culture of a small circle of *literati* in late Vandal or early Byzantine Carthage. As we shall see, their reading and interests overlap significantly with those of Fulgentius.

Common authors

One shared text is the famous *Pervigilium Veneris*.⁵³ The work is included by the Codex Salmasianus; its meter and phrasing are imitated by Fulgentius in the first inset poem in the *Mitologiae* preface.⁵⁴ A second overlap is Petronius. Fulgentius preserves a number of fragments of the *Satyrical*, both in the *Mitologiae* and the *Sermones*. The Codex Salmasianus includes one poem ascribed to Petronius, though the attribution is doubtful.⁵⁵ In addition AL R. 464–79 (S.462–77), preserved in V, were ascribed to Petronius by Scaliger – partly because two of them (R.466 and 476) are quoted and attributed to him by Fulgentius.⁵⁶ A third example is Publilius Optatianus Porfirius, the author of panegyric acrostics in praise of Constantine. He is generally, and probably rightly, identified with the Porfirius whose ‘anacyclic’ verses are preserved as AL R.81 (S.69) and the Porfirius whose epigrams are twice quoted by Fulgentius.⁵⁷

⁵² For the Vandalic component of the collection cf. Clover, ‘Carthage and the Vandals’, pp. 20–22. For Luxorius see Rosenblum, *Luxorius*; H. Happ, *Luxurius*. 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1986). On the variant spellings of the poet’s name cf. Happ, *Luxurius*, vol. 1, pp. 142–58. For Reposianus as a contemporary of Dracontius cf. P. Langlois, ‘Peut-on dater Reposianus (Anth. Lat 253 Riese)?’ *Rev. Phil.* 47 (1973), pp. 309–314; E. Courtney, ‘Some Poems of the Latin Anthology’, *Classical Philology*, 79 (1984), pp. 309f.

⁵³ AL R.200 (S.191).

⁵⁴ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 7. 11: ‘ubi guttas florulentae mane rorat purpurae|umor algens, quem serenae astra sudant noctibus’; cf. Perv. Ven. AL R.200.18 (S.191.18): ‘gutta praeceps orbe parvo sustinet casus suos.|en pudorem florulentae prodiderunt purpurae|umor ille quem serenae astra rorant noctibus|mane virgineas papillas solvit umentis peplo’. The *Pervigilium* poet’s trochaic tetrameter is also employed by Dracontius (Rom. 1) and by Tiberianus, whose authorship of the poem is argued by Alan Cameron, ‘The Pervigilium Veneris’, in *La Poesia tardoantica: tra retorica, teologia e politica* (Messina, 1984), pp. 209–34.

⁵⁵ AL R. 218 (S.209) cf. E. Courtney, *The Poems Of Petronius* (Atlanta, 1991), p. 74f.

⁵⁶ cf. Courtney, *Poems Of Petronius*, p. 8f.

⁵⁷ Fulg., *Mit.*, 2.1 p. 40.20; *Cont.* p. 100.19. Both AL R.81 (S.69) and the passages quoted by Fulgentius are included in G. Polara (ed.), *Publilii Optatiani Porfyrii Carmina* (Turin, 1973) as poems 28–30 (cf. Polara’s introduction, vol 1, p. xxviii). The attribution of the Fulgentian epigrams to the acrosticist is doubted by E. Kluge, ‘Kritische Anmerkungen zu den Gedichten des Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius’, *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 45 (1925), p. 72, but her objections are not compelling.

The epigrammatic tradition: Martial and Ausonius

The poets of the anthology were clearly conscious of themselves as writers in an epigrammatic tradition that runs from Catullus through Martial to Ausonius and the *Epigrammata Bobiensia*.⁵⁸ Ausonius is not included in the anthology, but it is hard to doubt that he was known to its compilers. He anticipates many of the forms found there: not only the Vergilian cento, but also monostichs on the months⁵⁹ and poems on the sayings of the Seven Sages.⁶⁰ He is certainly a familiar author to Fulgentius, who alludes to 'Ausonius' Sulpicilla⁶¹ and borrows a line from the *Cupido Cruciatu*s in one of his inset poems.⁶² Fulgentius may or may not have read Martial (there are no direct borrowings) but the compilers of the Anthology clearly had. One of his poems is included in the collection,⁶³ while two others are wrongly attributed to him.⁶⁴ His influence on Luxorius in particular has often been noted.⁶⁵

Fulgentius evokes the epigrammatic tradition in a programmatic way and in a prominent location: the opening of the *Mitologiae*. After lamenting his age's hostility to literature, Fulgentius explains why he has nonetheless taken up his pen:

quia soles, domine, meas cachinnantes sepius nenias lepore satyrico litas libentius adfectari, dum ludicro Talia ventilans epigrammate comedica solita est vernulitate mulcere, additur quia et mihi nuper imperasse dinosceris ut feriatas affatim tuarum aurium sedes lepido quolibet susurro permulceam: parumper ergo ausculta dum tibi rugosam sulcis anilibus ordior fabulam, quam nuper Attica saporante salsura, nocturna praesule lucerna commentus sum, ita somniali figmento delusam, quo non poetam furem aspicias, sed onirocretam soporis nugas ariolantem advertas.⁶⁶

since you are accustomed, my lord, to act regularly as benevolent patron to my giggly trifles anointed with satirical charm, as Thalia jousting with a playful epigram is accustomed to charm you with comic wryness, and since besides you know that you recently instructed me to soothe the unoccupied depths of your ears with some charming whisper, listen, then, for a while, as I set out a story wrinkled with an old woman's crowsfeet, which lately I fabricated under the patronage of the nocturnal lamp, with Attic brine to flavour it, a story so delirious with the figments of sleep that you do not see before you a raving poet, but rather witness a dream-interpreter sifting through the trifles of slumber.

⁵⁸ On the tradition cf. F. Munari, 'Die Spätlateinische Epigrammatik', *Philologus*, 102 (1958), pp. 127–38. Note that V includes excerpts from Martial as well as material from the Anthology.

⁵⁹ Auson. *Ecl.* 2; AL R.394 (S.390).

⁶⁰ Auson. *Lud. Sept Sap.*; Luxorius, AL R.351 (S.346).

⁶¹ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 13.3; cf. the epilogue to Auson., *Cento Nuptialis*.

⁶² Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 13.13 ≈ Auson., *Cup. Cruc.*, 42. Auson., *Ep.* 17 may also be the model for the description of nightfall in which the line appears, though Sen., *Apocol.*, 2 is also possible, as is a lost model (perhaps Tiberianus?).

⁶³ AL R.275 (S.269) = Mart., 1.57

⁶⁴ AL R.26, 276 (S.13, 270).

⁶⁵ cf. Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, index s.v. Martial; Happ, *Luxorius*, vol 1, p. 112; Munari, 'Die Spätlateinische Epigrammatik', p. 134. Vollmer's *index librorum* (though not his apparatus) notes a possible echo of Martial in Dracontius (*De Laud.*, 1.279 ≈ *Spect.*, 30.1).

⁶⁶ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 3.10.

The Apuleian echoes have often been noted. But the passage is also littered with the terminology of epigram. Key elements include the description of the work as *neniae* or *nugae*;⁶⁷ the application of *ludere* and related words to literary composition (here *ludicro*);⁶⁸ the characterization of literary divertissements as 'salty' or 'briny' (*Attica saporante salsura*),⁶⁹ and as possessing *lepos* (here *lepore satyrico*);⁷⁰ the muse Thalia as the emblem of self-consciously 'minor' genres;⁷¹ the use of *soles* or *solebas* to indicate an ongoing relationship with the addressee or dedicatee (here *quia soles ...*).⁷² From elsewhere in the prologue may be added the use of the diminutive *libellus* to describe one's own work and the reference to *poeticas ... ineptias*.⁷³

This comic-epigrammatic tradition is embodied by Fulgentius in the allegorical personage of Satyra. Advertised by her associate Calliope as a *lasciviens amica* for Fulgentius,⁷⁴ she is further described as '*florali lasciviens ... petulantia*'.⁷⁵ The erotic connotations of *lasciviens* are obvious (and further strengthened by the reference to the Floralia).⁷⁶ But *lascivus* and its derivatives also have literary-critical significance, being regularly used to designate lighter genres (satire, comedy, and epigram) over against the more ponderous forms (epic and tragedy).⁷⁷ The *lascivia* of Martial's page (contrasted, of course, with the spotlessness of his

⁶⁷ Luxorius, AL R.288.3f (S.283.3f): '*paginam|nugis refertam*'. cf. Catull., 1.4; Auson., Ep. 3.10; B. W. Swann, *Martial's Catullus* (Hildesheim, 1994), pp. 47–55; See also G. Galán Vioque, *Martial, Book VII. A Commentary*, tr. J. J. Zoltowski (Leiden, 2002), on Mart., 7.11.4.

⁶⁸ Luxorius, AL R.287.1 (S.282.1) (reading *lusus hos* with Shackleton Bailey); *ibid.* 21ff.: '*iocos ... quos ... lusit|frigens ingenium*'; AL R.90.1 (S.78.1): '*parvula quod lusit ... iunior aetas*'.

⁶⁹ AL R. 90.2 (S.78.2): '*quod sale Pierio garrula lingua sonat*'. cf. Galán Vioque, *Martial*, on Mart., 7.25.3; E. Gowers, *The Loaded Table* (Oxford, 1993), p. 41f.

⁷⁰ Catull., 16.7; Mart., 3.20.9; cf. Pliny, Ep. 1.16.5; D. O. Ross, Jr. *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 105–110.

⁷¹ Stat., *Silv.*, 5.3.98: '*quis lasciva vires tenuare Thalia|dulce*'; Mart., 7.17.3f: *inter carmina sanctiora si quis|lascivae fuerit locus Thaliae* (cf. Galán Vioque, *Martial, ad loc.*); Ps. Cato, *Mus.*, (= AL R. 664), 3: *comica lascivo gaudet sermone Thalia*.

⁷² Catull., 1.3ff: *namque tu solebas|meas esse aliquid putare nugas* (often imitated, cf. e.g. Auson., *Praef. var.* 4.1, cf. *Griph.* pref.); Mart., 2.6.5: *quae relegente me solebas|rapta exscribere*; AL R.216.7ff (S.207.7ff): *ne sterilem praestes indigno munere Musam,|utque soles, largus carmina nostra fove,|imperiiis ut nostra tuis servire Thalia|possit*. The appeal to past support can of course be otherwise expressed, for example, Auson., Ep., 3.9: *ostrea ...|enumerare iubes ...|adsuefacte meis ioculari carmine nugas*.

⁷³ For *libellus* cf. Luxorius, AL R.288.3 (S.283.3); For *ineptiae* of verse cf. Catull., 14b.1; Mart., 11.1.14; Auson., *Praef. var.*, 4.5; Auson., *Cup. Cruc.*, praef: *mirandi stuporem transtuli ad ineptiam poetandi*; cf. *Griph.*, praef: *ineptiolae huius ... materia*.

⁷⁴ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 12.11.

⁷⁵ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 14.2.

⁷⁶ For the interpretation of *florali* cf. G. Hays, 'Varia Fulgentiana', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 23 (1998), p. 130.

⁷⁷ cf. Hor., *Ars P.*, 105ff.; Mart., 7.68.3; 11.20.1, and so on; Galán Vioque, *Martial*, on Mart., 7.17.4; P. Migliorini, 'Lascivus nella terminologia critico-letteraria latina', *Anazetesis*, 2/3 (1980), pp. 14–21.

life) is a defining element of his poetic identity, while Fulgentius' depiction of his chosen genre as a vampish *femme fatale* can be compared with Martial's picture of his book as Spanish dancing-girl.⁷⁸

Another familiar epigrammatic motif appears in Calliope's account of her sojourn in Alexandria, where she would gladly have remained:

... nisi me etiam exinde bellis crudelior Galeni curia exclusisset, quae pene cunctis Alexandriae ita est inserta angiporis, quo chirurgicae carnificinae laniola pluriora habitaculis numerentur; denique ita certando remittunt in mortem quo ferant Caronem citius obitum, si collegio non donetur.⁷⁹

... had I not been expelled by something crueller than wars – the followers of Galen, who are so firmly rooted in almost all the alleyways of Alexandria that you can count more shops of surgical butchery than houses; and they so vie with one another in sending patients to their death that they say Charon will soon go under if he is not supplied with some colleagues.⁸⁰

The passage alludes to a view of the medical profession widespread in Greco-Roman culture (as it is in some quarters today).⁸¹ But it is a motif particularly prominent in epigram.⁸² The members of Fulgentius' *Galenus curia* are recognizably the descendants of Martial's doctor-turned-undertaker Diaulus and his bumbling Hippocratic colleagues.

Formal artifice

In addition to favourite authors and epigrammatic conventions, Fulgentius shares with the anthology's compilers an interest in literary games and restrictive forms. The anthology includes a number of such productions: acrostics;⁸³ *versus anacyclici*, that is, elegiac couplets which can be scanned and read backwards as well as forwards;⁸⁴ and elegiac couplets in which the same phrase opens the hexameter and closes the pentameter.⁸⁵ If the Porfirius cited by Fulgentius and the anthology poets is indeed Optatianus Porfirius, then they may also have known and appreciated the latter's elaborate acrostic poems. Fulgentius is himself an

⁷⁸ Mart., 11.16.3: *iam mea Lampsacio lascivit pagina versu|et Tartesiaca concrepat aera manu.*

⁷⁹ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 9.12.

⁸⁰ On this passage cf. G. Hays, 'Three Passages in Fulgentius', *Eranos*, 99 (2001), p. 100f.

⁸¹ cf. for example, Ps. Diog., *Epist.*, 28.7, R. Hercher (ed.), *Epistolographi Graeci* (Paris, 1871); Ps. Heraclit., *Epist.*, 6, Hercher, *Epistolographi Graeci*; Pliny, *HN*, 29.11–28; Petron., *Sat.*, 42.5; Sid. Apoll., *Epist.*, 2.12.3.

⁸² cf. Mart., 1.47; 6.53; cf. A. Dolderer, *Über Martials Epigramme auf Ärzte* (Tübingen, 1933); *Anth. Pal.*, 11.112–26; 257; 280; 401; Auson., *Epigr.*, 77–79.

⁸³ AL R.214 (S.205).

⁸⁴ AL R.81 (S.69).

⁸⁵ AL R.234–5, 265 (S.226–7, 259).

indifferent versifier and was certainly not up to producing anacyclic verses. But the formal constraints that govern such productions are paralleled by the ‘lipogrammatic’ device that governs the *De aetatibus*: the deliberate omission of successive letters of the alphabet in successive books.

A restrictive form particularly popular in late Antiquity is the cento, the ‘patchwork’ poem made up of lines and half-lines from earlier authors (especially Homer and Vergil).⁸⁶ The majority of extant Latin examples are preserved in the Codex Salmasianus. Not all of these necessarily date to the Vandal period, though at least one (Luxorius’ epithalamium for Fridus)⁸⁷ certainly does. At the very least their inclusion testifies to appreciation of the form among the North African poetic set. And it was appreciated also by Fulgentius. His inset poem on nightfall at *Mit.* pref. p. 13.6ff. lifts phrasing from Ausonius and an entire line, *more centonico*, from Corippus.⁸⁸ In this context we might also return to a passage discussed above. As we have seen, Fulgentius is here concerned to assuage Calliope’s fears about the locals:

Tum ego: ‘Non ita est, inquam, ut “audieras, sed fama fuit”. Nam “carmina tantum nostra valent”, Musa, “tela inter Martia, quantum”, “dulcis aquae salientis sitim restinguere rivo”. Et ut suum me amplius familiarem rescisset, illud etiam Terentianum adieci: ‘Olim isti fuit generi quondam questus apud saeculum prius’.⁸⁹

I replied, ‘it is not as “you have heard, but it was just a rumour”. For “my songs”, o Muse, “avail as much among the weapons of Mars as” “sweet waters from a bounding spring to quench men’s thirst.”’ And so that she might better realize that I was her devoted servant, I added that line of Terence’s, ‘there was lamentation of that kind in the old days’.

In effect, Fulgentius has constructed a kind of miniature cento composed of Verg., *Ecl.*, 9.11–12 + *Ecl.*, 5.47 + Ter., *Eun.*, 246 (altering Vergil’s *audieras et fama fuit* to *audieras sed fama fuit*, which consorts better with his point).⁹⁰ And he shows some skill in the process. By adding the line from *Eclogue* 5, he neatly reverses the force of the first lines from *Eclogue* 9; in the original Moeris laments that his songs avail amid arms ‘*quantum|Chaonias dicunt aquila veniente columbas*’. Fulgentius’ impromptu effort is hardly comparable to Hosidius Geta’s *Medea*, but it clearly succeeds in reassuring Calliope – both by the message it conveys and by its mastery of a form that clearly delighted Fulgentius and his contemporaries.

⁸⁶ On the cento tradition see G. Salanitro, ‘Osidio Geta e la poesia centonaria’, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II.34.3 (1997), pp. 2314–60.

⁸⁷ AL R.18. (S.n/a).

⁸⁸ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 13.13: *astrigeroque nitens diademate luna bicorni* ≈ Auson., *Cup. Cruc.*, 42; *Mit.* p. 13.9: *iam Phoebus disiungit equos iam Quintia iungit* ≈ Corippus, *Ioh.*, 8.279.

⁸⁹ Fulg., *Mit.*, pref. p. 9.24ff.

⁹⁰ Earlier prose writers occasionally string together Homeric or Vergilian quotations similarly. cf. Petron., *Sat.*, 132.11; Dio Chrys., 32.4 and 82ff.; J. F. Kindstrand (ed.), *Bion of Borysthenes* (Uppsala, 1976), frg. 15; Lucian, *Charon*, 22; Lucian, *Iupp. Trag.*, 1; Min Fel., 19.2.

Deliberate Obscurity

On a related note, we might look briefly at the short (and anonymous) preface contained in the Codex Salmasianus.⁹¹ This peculiar production cloaks a stereotyped humility formula in a farrago of archaisms and *hapax legomena*. The opening sentence (I do not venture a translation) may serve as a sample:

Hactenus me intra bulgam animi litescentis inipitum tua eritudo, instar mihi luminis aestimande †ade†, normam reduviare conpellit. sed antistat gerras meas anitas delibuta; et post artitum Nasonem quasi agredula quibusdam lacunis baburum stridorem averruncandus obblatero.

This '*portentosa . . . glossematum congeries*', as Shackleton Bailey's preface calls it, anticipates the frivolous hermeneutic experiments of the *Hisperica Famina*, Aldhelm and Osbern of Gloucester. Assuming that it formed part of the original anthology, it also constitutes a link with Fulgentius. The latter has over a hundred words attested nowhere else in Latin, and in his capacity for bombast he has few equals. More specifically, the anthology preface includes several words (*alucinari*, *antistare*, *averruncare*) glossed in Fulgentius' *Sermones*⁹² and at least one archaism (*creper*) conspicuously employed in the *Continetia* and also found in Martianus.⁹³

Word and image

Both the anthology poets and Fulgentius share an interest in ecphrasis, the formal description of places, persons or (especially) works of art. This is a characteristic feature of later Latin literature generally, and one emphasized and developed by the educational process.⁹⁴ Its effects in prose can be traced from basic school exercises to bravura passages like Apuleius' description of a statue of Actaeon.⁹⁵ The anthology includes a substantial number of ecphrastic pieces.⁹⁶ Baths are a

⁹¹ AL R.19 (S.6).

⁹² Fulg., *Serm.*, 52; 28; 51.

⁹³ Fulg., *Cont.* p. 86.7, Mart. Cap., 1.2

⁹⁴ M. Roberts, *The Jeweled Style* (Ithaca, 1989), pp. 66–121.

⁹⁵ Apul., *Met.*, 2.4.

⁹⁶ From the Codex Salmasianus note the following titles: AL R.23 (S.10): *Verba amatoris ad pictorem*; AL R.150 (S.139): *De tabula picta*; AL R.152 (S.141): *De Galatea in vase*; AL R.158 (S.147): *De imagine Vergilii*; AL R.312–13 (S.307–8): *De Fama picta in stabulo circi*; AL R.325 (S.320): *De Romulo picto ubi in muris fratrem occidit*; AL R.334–5 (S.329–30): *De venatore picto in manibus oculos habente*; AL R.347 (S.342): *De sigillo Cupidinis aquas fundentis*; AL R.348 (S.343): *De Neptuno in marmoreo alveo aquas fundente*; AL R.355 (S.350): *De chimaera aënea*; AL R.356 (S.351): *De statua Veneris in cuius capite violae sunt natae*; AL R.371 (S.366): *De rustica in disco facta, quae spinam tollit de planta Satyri*; AL R.374 (S.369): *De Diogene picto*. See further S. T. Stevens, 'Image and Insight: Ecphrastic Epigrams in the Latin Anthology' (unpubl. PhD, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1983).

favourite topic. We also find poems inspired by the conventional iconography of the months.⁹⁷ Especially well represented are the canonical stories of Greek mythology, and in this context it is hard not to be reminded of the frequency with which such scenes are found in surviving North African art, particularly mosaics. For the poets of the anthology, a myth was not merely a verbal narrative, but had a visual dimension as well.

This is no less true for Fulgentius. In the process of allegorizing gods and other mythological figures, he makes frequent reference to iconographical features, generally using the words *fingitur* or *pingitur*.⁹⁸ It might be tempting to see a distinction between the two words (*fingere* indicating a verbal description, *pingere* a visual representation), but Fulgentius in fact seems to use them interchangeably. As a result, it is not always easy to determine whether he has literary descriptions or artistic renderings in mind.⁹⁹ When he tells us, for example, that Saturn *velato ... capite ... fingitur*,¹⁰⁰ is he referring to visual renderings like those in the Calendar of 354? Or is he thinking of literary passages like Mart. Cap. 1.70: *glauco ... amictu tectus caput*? When he notes that Dionysus is 'depicted as a youth' and 'described as riding on tigers',¹⁰¹ his North African readers might have called up a number of related literary passages.¹⁰² But they must also have recalled the many Dionysiac scenes on North African mosaics.¹⁰³

Iconographic analysis is found in other ancient allegorists (it is common in Cornutus, for example), and Fulgentius may well have taken over some of these passages from earlier sources. But at least some are pretty certainly his own. An example is the exegesis of Venus on the half-shell:

Hanc etiam in mari natantem pingunt, quod omnis libido rerum patiatu naufragia, unde et Porfirius in epigrammate ait: 'Nudus, egens, Veneris naufragus in pelago.' Conca etiam marina portari pingitur, quod huius generis animal toto corpore simul aperto in coitu misceatur, sicut Iuba in fisiologis refert.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ On this sub-genre cf. E. Courtney, 'The Roman Months in Art and Literature', *Museum Helveticum*, 45 (1988), 33–57.

⁹⁸ Fulg., *Mit.*, 1.2 p. 17.20 (Saturnus): *velato ... capite ... fingitur*; 1.4 p. 19.15 (Neptunus): *tridentem ... ferre pingitur*; 1.15 p. 25.4: *cum decacorda Apollo pingitur cithara*; 1.18 p. 29.18 (Mercurius): *galere ... coperto capite pingitur*; 2.1 p. 38.18 (Juno): *cum sceptro pingitur*; 2.1 p. 40.5ff. (Venerem): *nudam pingunt ...; hanc etiam in mari natantem pingunt ... conca etiam marina portari pingitur*; 2.5 p. 45.3: *Ianuarius bifrons pingitur*; 2.12 p. 53.21: *iuvenis ... pingitur Dionisius*; 3.1 p. 60.21: *triceps Cymera pingitur*; 3.5 p. 65.14 (Cybele): *turrita pingitur*; 3.9 p. 76.21 (Marsyas): *cum porcina pingitur cauda*.

⁹⁹ At Fulg., *Cont.*, p. 99.12 *pingitur* clearly refers to a verbal description (*Aen.*, 6.495ff.) rather than a visual representation.

¹⁰⁰ Fulg., *Mit.*, 1.2, p. 17.20.

¹⁰¹ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 53.17ff.

¹⁰² Verg., *Aen.*, 6.804ff.; Hor., *Carm.*, 3.3.13ff.; Ov., *Ars Am.*, 1.549f.; Lygd., 6.15f., J. P. Postgate (ed.), *Tibulli Aliorumque Carminum Libri Tres* (Oxford, 1915); Stat., *Theb.*, 4.652–658; 7.564; Sil., *Pun.*, 17.647f.; Sid. Apoll., *Carm.*, 22.22ff.

¹⁰³ Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, pp. 173–87.

¹⁰⁴ Fulg., *Mit.*, 2.1 p. 40.18ff.

And they paint her swimming in the sea, because lust is always in financial straits, whence Porfirius says in an epigram 'naked, in want, a shipwrecked sailor on the sea of Venus'. She is painted being carried on a sea shell, because animals of this type mingle in intercourse with their whole bodies exposed, as Juba says in his *Physiologia*.

The description recalls representations like that in the House of the Marine Venus at Pompeii, and similar scenes are represented on North African mosaics.¹⁰⁵ The scene might well have invited allegorization by earlier authors, but the specific interpretation found here is surely Fulgentius' own. The moralizing is very much in his manner, and the citation of 'Porfirius in epigrammate' must be his own contribution. Moreover, by citing the line in this context, Fulgentius has effectively transformed Porfirius' epigram into an ecphrasis (assuming, of course that it was not one to start with). Word and image are here interwoven, in a way that would surely have pleased Luxorius and his colleagues.

The Aegritudo Perdiccae

A fourth possible link between Fulgentius and Vandal literature is the text known as the *Aegritudo Perdiccae* (formerly, but incorrectly, attributed to Dracontius).¹⁰⁶ This brief epyllion tells the unhappy story of Perdi[c]ca[s], a young man who falls in love with his mother and wastes away in consequence.¹⁰⁷ The story seems to be first attested in Lucian,¹⁰⁸ then appears as the subject of an epigram by Claudian.¹⁰⁹ Fulgentius summarizes the narrative:

Perdiccam ferunt venatorem esse; qui quidem matris amore correptus, dum utrumque et inmodesta libido ferveret et verecundia novi facinoris reluctaret, consumptus atque ad extremam tabem deductus esse dicitur.¹¹⁰

They say Perdicca was a hunter. He was possessed by love for his own mother, and as immodest desire blazed on one side and fear of this unheard-of transgression struggled with it on the other, is said to have wasted away and been reduced to a most pitiable state.

At least one detail in the Fulgentian version suggests the possibility of a direct relationship with the *Aegritudo*, namely the struggle between *libido* and

¹⁰⁵ Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, plates G–H; figs. 147–151.

¹⁰⁶ AL R. 808 (not in S.); cf. J. M. Hunt, Jr. 'The Aegritudo Perdiccae' (unpubl. Ph.D., Bryn Mawr, 1970); L. Zurli (ed.), *Aegritudo Perdiccae* (Leipzig, 1987). The (purely impressionistic) attribution to Dracontius is refuted by E. Wolff, 'L'Aegritudo Perdiccae: Un poème de Dracontius?', *Revue de Philologie*, 62 (1988), pp. 79–89. It should be acknowledged that the North African provenance of this text is not certain, though it has been assumed by most readers and seems probable enough.

¹⁰⁷ G. Ballaira, 'Perdica e Mirra', *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale*, 10 (1968), pp. 219–40; D. F. Bright, *The Miniature Epic in Vandal Africa* (Norman, OK, 1987), pp. 222–44.

¹⁰⁸ Lucian., *Hist. Conscr.*, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Claudian, *Carmina Minora*, 8.

¹¹⁰ Fulg., *Mit.*, 3.2 p. 61.21ff.

verecundia. With this compare *Aegr. Perd.* 198f.: ‘*Stant duo diversis pugnancia numina telis|ante toros, Perdica, tuos: Amor hinc, Pudor inde*’. The conflict of *amor* and *pudor* is a familiar Ovidian motif;¹¹¹ it seems probable that the author of the *Aegritudo* borrows it directly from Ovid. If there is a direct relationship, Fulgentius is probably the borrower, taking over the *Aegritudo*’s Ovidian conceit and translating it into his own baroque idiom. But there are also significant differences between the two texts that argue against direct dependence. That Fulgentius omits the scene of Perdicca’s diagnosis by Hippocrates (an episode prominently featured in the *Aegritudo*) may not be significant. More worrisome are divergences on points of fact. In the *Aegritudo* Perdicca’s mother is Castalia; in Fulgentius she is Polycaste (as in Claudian). Fulgentius makes Perdicca a hunter; there is no trace of this in the *Aegritudo*.

On the whole it seems more likely that both authors simply share an interest in the Perdicca story, which seems to have been much favoured by North African writers and artists. An episode from the story appears on a mosaic from Lambiridi in modern-day Algeria.¹¹² And its popularity is confirmed by the literary evidence. Dracontius alludes to it in terms suggesting it was familiar to his audience.¹¹³ The *Latin Anthology* includes a brief piece ‘*De Perdica*’, which may well come from the lost opening of the *Aegritudo*.¹¹⁴

Corippus

We have already noted Fulgentius’ borrowing of a line from Corippus’ *Iohannis* in the nightfall poem at *Mit.* 13.6ff. A less certain example is the reference to *mauricatos ... gressus*, for which Corippus might well have provided the inspiration.¹¹⁵ The first borrowing, at least, has a decidedly playful quality. The epic atmosphere of Corippus becomes mock-epic in Fulgentius, as the elaborate apparatus of Phoebus and Cynthia is deflated by the prose cap: ... ‘*et, ut in verba*

¹¹¹ cf. Ov., *Am.*, 3.10.28; *Met.*, 1.618f.; *Epist.*, 15.121; 19.171f.

¹¹² cf. F. Chamoux, ‘Perdiccas’, in *Hommages à Albert Grenier* (Brussels, 1962), pp. 386–96, who pointed out that the Lambiridi mosaic is clearly linked to a statuette found near Soissons in France and now in Dumbarton Oaks.

¹¹³ Dracontius, *Rom.*, 2.41 That Dracontius knew and imitated the *Aegritudo* is argued by W. Schetter, ‘Vier Adnoten zur “Aegritudo Perdiccae”’, *Hermes*, 119 (1991), pp. 103ff.

¹¹⁴ AL R.220 (S.211). cf. E. Courtney, ‘Observations on the Latin Anthology’, *Hermathena*, 129 (1980), p. 49.

¹¹⁵ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 5.23ff.: ... *arva quibus adhuc inpressae bellantium plantae mauricatos quod aiunt sigillaverunt gressus* ≈ Corippus, *Ioh.*, 2.137: *crudaque sub nigra calcatur Maurica planta*. There may be more such echoes to be found, though the likeliest place for them would perhaps have been in the lost closing books of the *De aetatibus*. I have not found any reminiscences of Corippus’ second poem, the *In laudem Iustini Augusti*. The latter, of course, was written not in North Africa but some 15 or 20 years later in Constantinople. Its Spanish manuscript tradition may suggest that it circulated in Africa, but it might also have reached Spain directly from the East, as suggested by R. Collins, ‘Julian of Toledo and the Education of Kings in Late Seventh-Century Spain’, in his *Law, Culture and Regionalism in Early Medieval Spain* (Aldershot, 1992), p. 9 n. 39.

paucissima conferam, nox erat'. Fulgentius' audience may well have recognized the allusion, and enjoyed the joke.

COMMON THREADS

As we have seen, Fulgentius has strong links to a common literary culture, one which has its roots in Apuleius and which in the later portion of the 'Vandal Century' produced a remarkable flowering of literary activity. To call these writers a 'movement' may be anachronistic, but there is some truth to the label. Not only do they share certain aesthetic values, but they also show an informed acquaintance with one another's work.¹¹⁶ I would single out three other features that link Fulgentius with most or all of these authors: a common educational background, an investment in a particular social context, and an ability to modulate between sacred and secular themes.

Grammar and rhetoric¹¹⁷

Africa had always been a seat of culture – at least in its own eyes. Juvenal, complaining of Roman hostility to rhetoric, recommends sarcastically that the aspiring orator emigrate to Gaul, 'or better yet to Africa, that wet-nurse of advocates'.¹¹⁸ Apuleius, addressing the Carthaginians, sings the praises of their city, 'where all the citizens are scholars, where every branch of learning is assimilated by schoolboys, displayed by the young, taught by the old ... Carthage, heavenly Muse of Africa, Carthage, inspiration of those who wear the toga.'¹¹⁹

The arrival of the Vandals in Carthage in 439 may have disturbed this tradition, but it did not permanently shake it.¹²⁰ Dracontius' teacher Felicianus is reported to have taught Romans and Vandals in the same classroom.¹²¹ Later, under

¹¹⁶ On the complex relationship between Martianus, Dracontius and the Anthology cf. Courtney, 'Some Poems of the Latin Anthology', pp. 309–13; Shanzer, *Philosophical and Literary Commentary*, pp. 17–21.

¹¹⁷ On this topic cf. also Hays, 'Tales Out of School'.

¹¹⁸ Juvenal, 7.147ff.: *accipiat te|Gallia vel potius nutricula causidicorum|Africa, si placuit mercedem ponere linguae*.

¹¹⁹ Apul., *Flor.*, 20: *ubi tota civitas eruditissimi estis, penes quos omnem disciplinam pueri discunt, iuvenes ostentant, senes docent ... Carthago Africae Musa caelestis, Carthago Camena togatorum!*

¹²⁰ P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West. from the Sixth through the Eighth Centuries*, tr. J. J. Contreni (Columbia, SC, 1976), pp. 37–9; H. Laaksonen, 'L'educazione e la trasformazione della cultura nel regno dei Vandali', *L'Africa romana*, 7 (1990), pp. 357–61; K. Vössing, *Schule und Bildung im Nordafrika der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Brussels, 1997), pp. 624–33. Indispensable background is H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, 1938) modified in *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique. Retractatio* (Paris, 1949).

¹²¹ Dracontius, *Rom.*, 1.14

Thrasamund, the poet Florentinus would echo Apuleius' praises, hymning '*Carthago studiis, Carthago ornata magistris*'.¹²² North Africans are prominent among the late antique *grammatici* whose written works survive. The extant *Commentum artis Donati* of the fifth-century grammarian Pompeius may derive from transcripts of his oral teaching.¹²³ In the late fifth or early sixth century Priscian moved from Caesarea in Mauretania to Constantinople, where he taught and presumably composed his *Institutiones grammaticae* and various other works. As the schools had survived the Vandals' arrival, so they survived their fall. In 534, immediately after the reconquest, we find Justinian providing for the public appointment of two *grammatici* and two rhetors.¹²⁴

The survival of these institutions is reflected in the literature of the Vandal and early Byzantine periods. All of these writers must have been trained in this educational system; Dracontius explicitly pays tribute to his teacher Felicianus in *Romulea* 1. Some of the anthology poets may have been *grammatici* themselves, as Corippus certainly was.¹²⁵ Others went on to careers in the law courts, whose continued functioning is attested by Fulgentius among others.¹²⁶ An unfortunately corrupt passage at the conclusion of Martianus' work seems to place him in a legal or rhetorical setting.¹²⁷ Dracontius certainly practiced as an advocate, and Luxorius too seems to refer to his forensic *tirocinium*.¹²⁸

This training is reflected in their works, sometimes obtrusively so. Both Dracontius and the anthology poets offer versified rhetorical exercises: the imaginary law case (*controversia*), the persuasive or deliberative speech set in the historical or mythological past (*suasoria*) and the speech put in the mouth of a mythological figure at some critical juncture (*ethopoeia*).¹²⁹ But rhetoric also influences their composition in subtler ways. Faced with composing a *suasoria* on

¹²² AL R.376.32 (S.371.32).

¹²³ H. Keil (ed.), *Grammatici Latini*. 7 vols (Leipzig, 1855–80), vol. 5, pp. 95–312; cf. R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), pp. 139–68.

¹²⁴ *Cod. Just.*, 1.27.1.42

¹²⁵ Kaster, *Guardians of Language* expresses doubts about Coronatus (p. 397) and Luxorius (p. 415). There is no reason to think Fulgentius was a *grammaticus*; cf. Hays, 'Tales out of School', p. 40f.

¹²⁶ Fulg., *Cont.*, p. 99.2: *tunc iurgii calomniam discitur et venalis lingua in alienis negotiis exercetur, . . . sicut in advocatis nunc usque conspicitur*. The corrupt *fgalagetici impetus* that assail Fulgentius in the city (*Mit.* pref. p. 4.15) may also refer to the noise and strife of the forum.

¹²⁷ *Mart. Cap.*, 9.999; cf. Shanzer, *Philosophical and Literary Commentary*, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Dracontius, *De Laud.*, 3.654ff: *ille ego qui quondam retinebam iura togatus*; *Rom.* 5 tit.: *Dracontius vir clarissimus et togatus fori proconsulis almae Karthaginis*; cf. W. Schetter, 'Dracontius togatus', *Hermes*, 117 (1989), pp. 342–350. For Luxorius cf. AL R.287.5 (S.282.5): *olim puer in foro*.

¹²⁹ **Ethopoeia**: Dracontius, *Rom.*, 4: *Verba Herculis cum videret hydrae serpentis capita pullare post caedes*; AL R.198 (S.189): *Verba Achillis in parthenone cum tubam Diomedis audisset*; for a prose example cf. Ennodius, *Dict.*, W. Hartel (ed.), CSEL, 6 (Vienna, 1882), 28 (Augustine, *Conf.*, 1.17.27 refers to his composition of such a piece). **Controversia**:

his own behalf, the imprisoned Dracontius marshals historical and mythical exempla with a fluency that would have made Felicianus proud.¹³⁰

Fulgentius' works too are informed by grammatical and rhetorical training.¹³¹ The embedded panegyric of the *dominus rex* who puts barbarians and tax collectors to flight 'like the dawning of the sun as the shadows vanish from the sky' follows to the letter the precepts of the rhetorical handbooks:

You should give a vivid portrayal of the situation in which [the provincials] were badly treated by the previous governor, and amplify their hardships, not, however, speaking ill of the predecessor, but simply reporting the subjects' misfortune. Then go on: 'When night and darkness covered the world, you were seen like the sun, and at once dissolved all the difficulties.'¹³²

Rhetorical elements appear elsewhere in Fulgentius too. The story of Hercules and Omphale in *Mit.* 2.2 opens with a grandiloquent apostrophe that places us at once in a mock-declamatory atmosphere: '*Parcite, quaeso, iudices humanis ardoribus! Quid enim puerilis aut muliebris sensus in amorem efficiat, ex quo in libidinis pugna Herculeae desudat virtus?*' The *De aetatibus* too breathes the air of the rhetor's classroom. The chapter on Alexander (*Aet.* 10) clearly owes much to declamation (Alexander had always been among the most popular topics for *suasoriae*). So too do the set-piece description of the siege of Bethulia (*Aet.* 9 p. 161.21ff.) and the parade of Roman historical exempla in *Aet.* 11 ('*quid post haec referam ... Brutum? ... omitto Fabium ...; quid referam Curtium ...?*' etc.). And the overall style of the work, with its frequent rhetorical questions, apostrophes and *sententiae*, is unthinkable without a rhetorical background.

An important focus both for grammatical education and for cultural identity more generally is the Vergilian corpus (especially the *Aeneid*).¹³³ This too is reflected in Vandal literature. The influence of Vergil on all Latin hexameter poets hardly needs stressing. In Dracontius it is largely a matter of phrasing.¹³⁴ In Corippus' *Iohannis*, on the other hand, the *Aeneid* exerts a more thorough-going influence, not only on wording but on structure and characterization.¹³⁵ It was Vergil above all whom

Dracontius, *Rom.*, 5 tit: *Controversia de statua viri fortis*; AL R.21 (S.8) (a fisherman accused of sacrilege). **Suasoria**: Dracontius, *Rom.*, 9 tit: *Deliberativa Achillis, an corpus Hectoris vendat*; AL R.242 (S.235) (urging Augustus to preserve the *Aeneid*). cf. C. Weyman, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Christlich-Lateinischen Poesie* (Munich, 1926), pp. 150–152. Courtney, 'Some Poems of the Latin Anthology', p. 310f. suggests that AL R.21 and 198 (S.8 and 189) might actually be by Dracontius.

¹³⁰ Dracontius, *De Laud.*, 3.251ff.; *Satisf.*, 175ff.

¹³¹ For what follows see Hays, 'Tales Out of School', pp. 30–36.

¹³² D. A. Russell, and N.G. Wilson (ed. and tr.), *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford, 1981), p. 95.

¹³³ S. Gsell, 'Virgile et les africains', in *Cinquentenaire de la Faculté des Lettres d'Alger* (Algiers, 1932), pp. 5–42 repr. in his *Etudes sur l'Afrique antique* (Lille, 1981), pp. 273–310.

¹³⁴ P. Langlois, 'Dracontius', *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, 4 (Stuttgart, 1959), p. 260; C. Curti, 'Draconzio', *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, 2 (Rome, 1985), p. 138.

¹³⁵ For verbal borrowings cf. R. Amann, *De Corippo priorum poetarum Latinorum*

poets aimed to emulate, as Corippus makes clear in the preface to the *Iohannis*: '*Aeneam superat melior virtute Iohannes, | sed non Vergilio carmina digna cano*'.¹³⁶ But even lesser productions display the same preoccupation with the language and characters of Vergil's poem. The Codex Salmasianus offers 'variations on a theme by Vergil' by Coronatus¹³⁷ and two anonymous poets;¹³⁸ bogus elegiacs attributed to the poet;¹³⁹ an excerpt from Propertius about Vergil;¹⁴⁰ a letter of Dido to Aeneas,¹⁴¹ and epigrams on Pallas and Turnus,¹⁴² Nisus and Euryalus,¹⁴³ a picture of Vergil,¹⁴⁴ and a copy of the poet's works eaten by a donkey.¹⁴⁵ Even theological writers were not immune. Vergil is the only pagan poet quoted (albeit disapprovingly) in the sober theological treatises of Fulgentius of Ruspe¹⁴⁶ and is a persistent presence (along with Dracontius and Corippus) in the *Carmen de paenitentia* of Verecundus of Iunci.

Vergil's centrality for Fulgentius is equally obvious. He is among the most often-quoted authors in the *Mitologiae*, and the *Continetia* of course is devoted entirely to an allegorical exposition of the *Aeneid*. Although Fulgentius is primarily concerned to interpret the epic as a moral allegory, he also reflects other aspects of late antique Vergilian scholarship. He borrows an anecdote about Vergil's birth from Donatus' life of the poet.¹⁴⁷ His reading of the poem as a panegyric of Aeneas (*laudis ... materia*, p. 87.17) is closely paralleled in the rhetorical commentary of Tiberius Claudius Donatus. Though there is nothing distinctively Christian about

imitatore (Oldenburg, 1885), pp. 7–12; M. Manitius, 'Zu spätlateinischen Dichtern', *Zeitschrift für die Österreichischen Gymnasien*, 37 (1886), pp. 82–97. More generally: J. Blänsdorf, '*Aeneadas rursus cupiunt resonare Camenae*. Vergils epische Form in der *Iohannis* des Corippus', in E. Lefèvre (ed.), *Monumentum Chiloniense* (Amsterdam, 1975), pp. 524–45; V. Tandoi, 'Corippo', in *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, 1 (Rome, 1984), pp. 890–92; M. A. Vinchesi, 'Tradizione letteraria e pubblico nella *Iohannis* di Corippo', in F. Conca and R. Maisano (eds), *La Mimesi Bizantina* (Naples, 1998), pp. 195–9; C. Tommasi Moreschini, 'La *Iohannis* Corippea', *Prometheus*, 27 (2001), pp. 262ff. Cf. also M. Lausberg, '"Parcere Subiectis": Zur Vergilnachfolge in der *Iohannis* des Coripp', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 32 (1989), pp. 105–26, who argues that Corippus is engaged in a 'christliche Korrektur' (rather than mere imitation) of Vergil. Here one could draw a parallel with Fulgentius' *Continetia*.

¹³⁶ Corippus, *Ioh.*, pref. 15ff.

¹³⁷ AL R.223 (S.214).

¹³⁸ AL R.244, 255 (S.237, 249).

¹³⁹ AL R.256–63 (S.250–7); one is actually a couplet from Ovid's *Tristia*.

¹⁴⁰ AL R.264 (S.258) = Prop., 2.34.65f.

¹⁴¹ AL R.83 (S.71).

¹⁴² AL R.46 (S.33).

¹⁴³ AL R.77 (S.65).

¹⁴⁴ AL R.158 (S.147).

¹⁴⁵ AL R.222 (S.213). See further V. Tandoi, 'Antologia Latina', in *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, 1 (Rome, 1984), pp. 198–205.

¹⁴⁶ Fulg. Rusp., *C. Fab.*, J. Fraipont (ed.), CCSL, 91 (Turnhout, 1968), 34 citing *Aen.*, 1.416ff.: (*ut de tuis quoque litteris tibi aliquid ingeramus*); Fulg. Rusp., *Ep.* 2.5, citing *Aen.* 6.429 to reject the phrase '*atra dies*'.

¹⁴⁷ Fulg., *Cont.*, p. 97.2.

his own interpretation of the *Aeneid*, he is familiar with – and apparently endorses – a Christian interpretation of the fourth Eclogue.¹⁴⁸

Though no other author even approached Vergil's importance, Lucan was perhaps his nearest competitor. Described by Quintilian as 'renowned for his *sententiae* and ... a better model for orators than poets', he was popular in the late antique schoolroom.¹⁴⁹ Fulgentius refers to the *Bellum Civile* as a school text¹⁵⁰ and this is confirmed by the frequency with which it is cited in Priscian's *Institutes*. Lucan is echoed frequently by Dracontius, particularly in the *Romulea*.¹⁵¹ The *Bellum Civile* is celebrated in a distich (not necessarily of Vandal date) in the Anthology.¹⁵² Above all, Lucan is an important model for Corippus.¹⁵³ He provides the precedent for an epic on relatively recent history, and one composed without a divine apparatus. Whole episodes of Corippus' poem are based on the *Bellum Civile*, not least *Iohannis* 6. 292ff., clearly modelled on Cato's earlier march through the Libyan desert in Lucan. It is no surprise, then, to find Lucanian allusions in Fulgentius. The *Bellum Civile* is explicitly cited on several occasions, and there are silent echoes elsewhere.¹⁵⁴

Grammatica was a serious business in late Antiquity; a source of status to its practitioners, a mark of *Romanitas* in those who mastered it.¹⁵⁵ That does not mean it was always taken seriously. Along with a motley crew of dwarves, eunuchs, charioteers, doctors, and pantomimists, Luxorius' targets include a *grammaticus furiosus*,¹⁵⁶ as well as an *advocatus effeminatus*¹⁵⁷ and a *causidicus turpis*.¹⁵⁸ Another epigrammatist offers a squib *De magistro ludi neglegenti*.¹⁵⁹ The prominence of such figures in late antique skoptic epigram (not only in Africa) is indicative of the increasingly higher profile of the *grammaticus* in late antique

¹⁴⁸ Fulg., *Cont.*, p. 102.21.

¹⁴⁹ Quint., *Inst.*, 10.1.90: *sententiis clarissimus et ... magis oratoribus quam poetis imitandus*.

¹⁵⁰ Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 32.4.

¹⁵¹ cf. M. A. Vinchesi, 'La Fortuna di Lucano fra tarda antichità e medioevo', *Cultura e scuola*, 77 (1981), pp. 67–9; Moussy and Camus, *Dracontius*, p. 60.

¹⁵² AL R.233 (S.225).

¹⁵³ cf. Amann, *De Corippo*, pp. 25–28; Manitius, 'Zu spätlateinischen Dichtern', p. 98; more generally W. Ehlers, 'Epische Kunst in Coripps *Iohannis*', *Philologus*, 124, (1980), pp. 110ff., 135; Vinchesi, 'La Fortuna di Lucano', pp. 69–72; Vinchesi, 'Tradizione letteraria e pubblico', p. 200f.; Tommasi Moresschini 'La *Iohannis* Corippea', pp. 270–273.

¹⁵⁴ Citations: Fulg., *Mit.*, p. 30.16 (Luc., 1.662); 53.14 (Luc., 10.163; cf. *Aet.* p. 166.10); *Serm.* p. 125.10 (Luc., 9.593). Explicit allusion: *Mit.* p. 14.23. These are noted by Vinchesi, 'La Fortuna di Lucano', p. 66. To these can be added a number of probable reminiscences: *Aet.* p. 168.2 (≈ Luc., 1.95); p. 169.18 (≈ Luc., 1.254ff.); p. 176.16 (≈ Luc., 1.62).

¹⁵⁵ cf. R. A. Kaster, 'The Grammarian's Authority', *Classical Philology*, 75 (1980), pp. 216–41; Kaster, *Guardians of Language*; T. Viljamaa, 'The Grammarian and his Authority in the Society of the Roman Empire', in S. Jäkel (ed.), *Power and Spirit* (Turku, 1993), pp. 87–97.

¹⁵⁶ AL R.294 (S.289).

¹⁵⁷ AL R.295 (S.290).

¹⁵⁸ AL R.340 (S.335).

¹⁵⁹ AL R.96 (S.85).

culture generally.¹⁶⁰ It is in the context of this sort of scholastic humour that we should read Fulgentius' characterization of Vergil as a crotchety schoolmaster, demanding that his stolid pupil Fulgentius dredge up a summary of *Aeneid* 1 from rusty memories of his schooldays.¹⁶¹

Social milieu

A second characteristic that links all these authors is the complex social economy in which their works were produced and consumed.¹⁶² On the one hand there is the relationship of patronage that links an author with a social superior. The natural expression of such a relationship is panegyric. In the fifth and sixth centuries this increasingly means verse panegyric. The form was standard in the Greek East by the fourth century; it found its first and most distinguished Latin practitioner in Claudian.¹⁶³ In the fifth century we find Merobaudes and Sidonius writing verse panegyrics in Gaul. But the form flourished in Africa too. Two of the outstanding sixth-century Latin examples are by African authors, albeit both working at Constantinople: Corippus and Priscian.¹⁶⁴ The *Latin Anthology* includes shorter celebrations of Huneric by Cato¹⁶⁵ and of Thrasamund by Florentinus.¹⁶⁶ Other poets celebrate the baths and gardens of Vandal grandees.¹⁶⁷ The case of Dracontius illustrates such a relationship gone interestingly awry. Instead of hymning Gunthamund, the poet had unwisely chosen to praise an *ignotum ... dominum*.¹⁶⁸ Imprisoned by Gunthamund in consequence, he then composed the palinodic *Satisfactio* in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain pardon. (His release by Thrasamund prompted a panegyric, now lost, in honour of that monarch).

¹⁶⁰ For earlier examples cf. W. Speyer (ed.), *Epigrammata Bobiensia* (Leipzig, 1963), 46–47; 61; 64; Lucil., *Anth. Pal.*, 11.138–40; 278–9; Apollinarius, *Anth. Pal.*, 11.399; Auson., *Epigr.*, 50; 81 (and N. M. Kay, *Ausonius. Epigrams* (London, 2001), *ad loc.*); Palladas, *Anth. Pal.*, 9.169; 173–5; 11.378.

¹⁶¹ Fulg., *Cont.*, p. 90.19ff. cf. J. W. Jones, Jr. 'Vergil as Magister in Fulgentius', in C. Henderson, Jr (ed.), *Classical, Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman* (Rome, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 273–5.

¹⁶² cf. M. Chalon, G. Devallet, P. Force, M. Griffe, J.-M. Lassère and J.-N. Michaud, 'Memorable factum: Une célébration de l'évergétisme des rois Vandales dans l'Anthologie Latine', *Ant. af.*, 21 (1985), pp. 207–62.

¹⁶³ T. Viljamaa, *Studies in Greek Encomiastic Poetry of the Early Byzantine Period* (Helsinki, 1968); A. Cameron, *Claudian. Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 23–24, 254.

¹⁶⁴ T. Nissen, 'Historisches Epos und Panegyrikos in der Spätantike', *Hermes*, 75 (1940), pp. 298–301 argues against viewing the *In laudem Iustini* as a panegyric. This is true at a formal level, but no one would deny the work's panegyric intent.

¹⁶⁵ AL R.387 (S.382).

¹⁶⁶ AL R.376 (S.371).

¹⁶⁷ AL R.210–14 (S.201–5); 369 (S.364). For this sub-genre see the exhaustive study of S. Busch, *Versus Balnearum. Die antike Dichtung über Bäder und Baden im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart, 1999).

¹⁶⁸ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 93f. On the nature of this verse, and the identity of its likely recipient, see Merrills, Chapter 7 in the present volume.

Kings were not the only possible patrons. We find Luxorius writing poems for Vandal grandees like Fridamal and Oageis.¹⁶⁹ The anthology also includes an appeal to an unknown patron for financial support and a longer begging letter addressed to a certain Victorinianus.¹⁷⁰ The author, Flavius Felix, appeals for an appointment as a *clericus* so he can keep body and soul together; perhaps Thrasamund had not rewarded his bath poems (AL R.210–14, S.201–5) as they deserved. Corippus seems to have been more successful; his *Iohannis* evidently won him preferment in the imperial administration, though the appeal to the quaestor Anastasius prefaced to the *In laudem Iustini* suggests that life in Constantinople was not all he had hoped. Whether Fulgentius' praise of the *dominus rex* brought him any concrete rewards we do not know.

In addition to patronage we also find the kind of mutual back-scratching familiar from earlier periods of Roman literary history: the exchange of dedications and flattery among a circle of equals. The prefaces to all four of Fulgentius' works invoke the standardized *topoi* of this tradition:¹⁷¹ the pretence that it is only the addressee's pressing request that has extorted the work from the reluctant author¹⁷²; mention of the addressee's receptiveness to previous efforts¹⁷³; self-abasing professions of incompetence;¹⁷⁴ requests for indulgence and correction.¹⁷⁵ The author was expected to be modest about his own efforts, but to praise those of others shamelessly. There is an almost comic example in the exchange of letters between the presbyter Parthemius and the Vandal Comes Sigisteus.¹⁷⁶ Sigisteus informs Parthemius that 'as I perused the productions of your learning, the eloquence of your style filled my heart, and lifted my spirits with continually renewed joy.'¹⁷⁷ Parthemius writes back in equally flattering terms, concluding with a versified assurance that 'learned Greece has not produced such a man, nor has great Larissa given birth to such an Achilles as you, whom Africa, warlike and productive of harvests, has exalted to the stars.'¹⁷⁸

The addressees by and large mirror the authors in social status. Some are professional *grammatici*. Dracontius addressed two of his minor poems to the

¹⁶⁹ AL R.304, 345 (S.299, 340).

¹⁷⁰ AL R.216, 254 (S.207, 248).

¹⁷¹ cf. T. Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces* (Stockholm, 1964).

¹⁷² Fulg., *Mit.*, pref. p. 3.14: *quia ... mihi nuper imperasse dinosceris*; *Serm.*, pref. p. 111.2: *libellum ... quem ... impertiri iussisti*; *Aet.*, pref. p. 129.212: *tuo nullo modo inobediens ... imperio*. cf. Luxorius, AL R.287.1 (S.282.1): *tuis ... placere iussis*.

¹⁷³ Fulg., *Mit.*, pref. p. 3.10: *quia soles, domine, meas ... nenias ... adfectari*.

¹⁷⁴ Fulg., *Mit.*, 2 pref. p. 35.9: *meam stultitiam*.

¹⁷⁵ Fulg., *Mit.*, 3 pref. p. 58.22: *non ut invidus detrahis, sed ut doctissimus corrigis*. cf. Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, pp. 106ff., 141–3. A similar *topos* underlies the nearly impenetrable prose preface AL R.19 (S.6).

¹⁷⁶ Sigisteus, *Epistola ad Parthemium*, and Parthemius, *Rescriptum ad Sigisteum*, in A. Hamman (ed.), *PL Supplementa*, 3 (Paris, 1963), cols 447–9.

¹⁷⁷ *Disertitudinis tuae paginam relegentibus nostros animos eloquens ornatus implevit et novo semper gaudio gestit affectum*.

¹⁷⁸ ... *docta talem nec Graecia misit* | *Neque Larissa potens similem procreavit*

grammaticus Felicianus.¹⁷⁹ Fulgentius' *Sermones* is dedicated *ad grammaticum Calcidium* (at least according to one branch of the manuscript tradition). Others seem to be amateurs of letters. The poet Coronatus dedicated a grammatical work *De ultimis syllabis* to Luxorius.¹⁸⁰ Another anthology poet, the importunate Flavius Felix, may have been the dedicatee of the *Carmen de resurrectione mortuorum*, a hexameter composition (variously transmitted under the names of Tertullian and Cyprian), which includes echoes of Dracontius.¹⁸¹ A few seem to have been clerics, like the *presbyter Catus* of Fulgentius' *Mitologiae*, or the anonymous 'deacon' to whom his *Continentia* is directed.

In some cases authors invoke groups rather than individuals. The preface to Corippus' *Iohannis* is addressed to a group of unidentified *procres*, and was clearly written to introduce a public recitation, presumably in Carthage.¹⁸² The glossolalic preface to the *Latin Anthology* is directed to an unnamed group of *viri optimi*; this might imply a public reading but it might also suggest a more informal gathering.¹⁸³ Here it is worth comparing the preface to the *De aetatibus*, in which Fulgentius credits his dedicatee with having turned his thoughts to the possibility of lipogrammatic composition: 'you mentioned that you had read the work of the poet Xenophon in twenty-four volumes, with individual letters omitted from individual books – a remarkable accomplishment which all of us who were present rightly praised.'¹⁸⁴ The casual reference to *cuncti qui interfuimus* briefly conjures up the kind of salon culture familiar from a much earlier period, with the unnamed addressee taking over the role played by the younger Pliny in the early second century or Symmachus at the end of the fourth.

Christianity and classicism

Along with the *Pervigilium Veneris* and Reposianus's poem on the adultery of Mars and Venus, the *Latin Anthology* includes poems on the Judgement of Paris, Adonis,

Achillem, |Te qualem armipotens, te fertilis Africa frugum| Vexit ad astra virum. I cite the text in K. Buechner, (ed.), *Fragmenta poetarum Latinorum epicorum et lyricorum praeter Ennium et Lucilium* (Leipzig, 1982), p. 201, as emended by Reifferscheid.

¹⁷⁹ Dracontius, *Rom.*, 1; 3.

¹⁸⁰ cf. Keil, *Grammatici Latini*, vol. 4, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ cf. J. H. Waszink, 'Einige Bemerkungen über den Text des *Carmen de resurrectione mortuorum et de iudicio domini*', in *Jenseitsvorstellungen in Antike und Christentum. Gedenkschrift für Alfred Stüiber* (Münster, 1982), p. 79f.

¹⁸² Corippus, *Ioh.*, pref. 1: *Victoris, procres, praesumpsi dicere lauros ...* (The heading *Praefatio ad Procres Carthaginienses* is due to a nineteenth-century editor and has no manuscript support). On the preface of the *Iohannis* and its implied public cf. V. Zarini, 'La Préface de la Johannide de Corippe: certitudes et hypothèses', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 32 (1986), pp. 74–91, esp. 80–82, 84ff.

¹⁸³ AL R.19 (S.6).

¹⁸⁴ Fulg., *Aet.*, pref. p. 130.20: *Dixisti enim legisse te librorum bisduodenum volumen Xenofontis poetae in singulis libris singulis litteris diminutis, quod quidem opus mirificum cuncti qui interfuimus iuste praetulimus.*

Hylas and Hercules, Bellerophon, Leda, Marsyas, the Muses, Ganymede, Medea, Europa, Narcissus, Daphne, Philoctetes, Telephus, and Galatea – to name just a few. But it also contains poems on the judgement of Solomon,¹⁸⁵ the baptismal ritual,¹⁸⁶ the cross,¹⁸⁷ and the virgin birth.¹⁸⁸ An epitaph *De christiano infante mortuo* betrays an unmistakably Christian attitude, whether its title is original or not.¹⁸⁹ There is no reason to doubt that most, if not all, of the authors were Christian.¹⁹⁰ We noted above that Flavius Felix, the would-be *clericus* and epigrammatist has been identified as the dedicatee of the *Carmen de resurrectione mortuorum*. The opening of the *Carmen* in turn refers to earlier secular compositions by the same author.¹⁹¹ This is a Christian society, but it is one entirely at ease with classical forms and themes.

The same combination of Christian belief and pagan convention is found in Dracontius, whose oeuvre includes purely ‘secular’ poems (the *Romulea* and *Orestis tragoedia*) on the one hand and the devoutly Christian *De laudibus Dei* on the other. If the chronology recently proposed by David Bright is correct, the two categories alternate throughout Dracontius’ career.¹⁹² Yet even this formulation is misleading, suggesting as it does that an individual work must fall into one category or the other.¹⁹³ For the *De laudibus Dei* too has its secular side.¹⁹⁴ Here one may cite not only the classical hexameters in which it is composed, but the series of exempla at 3.251ff., in which Brutus, Scaevola, Regulus and others are presented as counterparts in selfless sacrifice to Abraham and Isaac, Daniel, the three boys in the burning fiery furnace and the apostle Peter. Similarly at *Satisfactio* 157ff. biblical exempla (David, Solomon, St Stephen) are followed by examples of merciful Roman rulers (Julius Caesar, Augustus, Titus, and – rather unexpectedly – Commodus). One could hardly look for a better example of this interpenetration than *De Laudibus Dei* 1.393, where Eve ‘*constitit ante oculos nullo velamine tecta*’

¹⁸⁵ AL R.93 (S.82).

¹⁸⁶ AL R.378 (S.373).

¹⁸⁷ AL R.379 (S.374).

¹⁸⁸ AL R.380 (S.375).

¹⁸⁹ AL R.92 (S.81).

¹⁹⁰ Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, pp. 45–8 discusses the evidence for Luxorius’ religious beliefs. While he rightly points to the absence of explicit Christian references, he overestimates the likelihood that *anyone* in mid fifth-century Carthage was anything but a Christian (of whatever variety).

¹⁹¹ J. H. Waszink, ‘Musae Luciferae’, in *Forma Futuri. Studi in onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino* (Turin, 1975), pp. 683–92.

¹⁹² D. F. Bright, ‘The Chronology of the Poems of Dracontius’, *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 50 (1999), pp. 193–206, placing *Rom.*, 1–5 and 9 before the poet’s imprisonment, with *Rom.*, 6, 8, 10 and the *Orestis Tragoedia* after his release.

¹⁹³ cf. Langlois, ‘Dracontius’, p. 254.

¹⁹⁴ For what follows cf. Langlois, ‘Dracontius’, p. 261. Some have attempted to discern Christian messages (or at least a distinctively Christian perspective) in the *Romulea* and *Orestes*; cf, for example, Bright, *The Miniature Epic*, p. 210f.; Langlois, ‘Dracontius’, p. 266f. And compare W. Schetter’s review of Bright, *The Miniature Epic*, in *Gnomon*, 63 (1991), pp. 213–23.

– a line modelled on Ovid’s description of the nude Corinna at *Amores* 1.5.17: ‘*ut stetit ante oculos posito velamine nostros*’.¹⁹⁵

Corippus manages to combine a thoroughly Christian perspective on the events he describes with the language and conventions of classical epic. His hero Johannes prays in dutiful Christian fashion,¹⁹⁶ inveighs against idolatry¹⁹⁷ and even goes to church on Sunday.¹⁹⁸ Yet the same poet can compare the sufferings of Africa to those Phaethon would have brought upon the earth ‘had not the omnipotent father with his lightning bolt unyoked his horses, extinguishing fire with fire’.¹⁹⁹ Perspective can shift within a few words. Thus Satan, appearing to Johannes in Book 1, is identified as ‘*mente malignus|angelus ille ... claro deiectus Olympo*’.²⁰⁰ The juxtaposition of the Christian *angelus* and the pagan *Olympo* might strike us as jarring. It evidently did not bother the poet or his readers.²⁰¹

In Fulgentius this ‘Begegnung von Antike und Christentum’ is most often invoked with reference to the *Mitologiae* and *Continetia* – not always helpfully. Fulgentius is sometimes said to have interpreted Greek myths and the *Aeneid* as ‘Christian allegories’. This is emphatically not the case. He does not interpret Hercules and Dionysus as Christ, or the story of Leda as a presentiment of the Virgin Birth, as later medieval allegorists would do. Rather, he draws on pre-existing allegorizing traditions, in some cases reaching back to the fifth century BC, either to rationalize the stories or to extract from them a generic moral message that would have been as acceptable to Seneca as to Clement of Alexandria.

The easy coexistence of Christian faith and pagan culture is reflected not only in the content of the two works, but also in their *mise-en-scène*. Rather than ostentatiously rejecting the conventions of muse invocations, as poets like Paulinus of Nola had done, Fulgentius instead offers an elaborate cletic hymn, summoning the muse Calliope and some of her sisters, and bantering agreeably with them when they arrive.²⁰² In the *Continetia* he calls up the shade of Vergil (carefully avoiding

¹⁹⁵ The same phenomenon in reverse is found at *Cont.* p. 86.12 where Fulgentius tells Vergil that *nobis ... erit maximum, si vel extremas tuas praestringere contingerit fimbrias*, thereby equating the pagan poet with the Christ of Matt. 14:36: *et rogabant eum ut vel fimbriam vestimenti eius tangerent*.

¹⁹⁶ Corippus, *Ioh.*, 1.282ff.

¹⁹⁷ Corippus, *Ioh.*, 2.110ff.

¹⁹⁸ Corippus, *Ioh.*, 6.98ff. cf. generally H. Hofmann, ‘Corippus as a Patristic Author’, *Vigiliae Christianae*, 43 (1989), pp. 361–77.

¹⁹⁹ Corippus, *Ioh.*, 1.338ff.

²⁰⁰ Corippus, *Ioh.*, 1.252f.

²⁰¹ Corippus’ range would be extended still further if in addition to his epic and verse panegyric he was the author of the *Metrum in Evangelia*, *De diis gentium* and *De principio mundi vel de die iudicii et resurrectione carnis* attributed to ‘Cresconius’ by a ninth-century library catalogue from Lorsch. Cf. B. Bischoff, *Die Abtei Lorsch im Spiegel ihrer Handschriften*. 2nd edn (Lorsch, 1989), p. 78 with p. 100 n. 61. But this is very doubtful; the name is a common one.

²⁰² For Paulinus’s rejection of the Muses cf. Paulinus, *Carmina*, W. Hartel (ed.), CSEL, 30 (Vienna, 1894), 10.21ff.; 110ff.; 15.30ff.; E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. W. Trask (London, 1953), p. 235f.

the question of Vergil's present location) to explain the allegorical content of the *Aeneid*. As a professing Christian, Fulgentius occasionally interjects to offer scriptural corroboration of Vergil's points. On one point – the reference to metempsychosis in *Aeneid* 6 – he raises a Christian objection, only to draw from the 'smiling' poet a pert reminder that 'I did not hire on to your project to expound what I *ought* to have meant, but to explain what I *did* mean'.²⁰³ This acceptance of Vergil as the pagan that he was, like the casual use of pagan literary apparatus in the *Mitologiae* preface, does not suggest an author – or readership – consumed with 'anxiety' about pagan culture.²⁰⁴ Instead it suggests a well-developed ability to compartmentalize, and a society secure enough in its Christianity that it has nothing to fear from poetic fictions.

The symbiosis of classicism and Christianity can be found also in the superficially more Christian *De aetatibus*. Following the basic Eusebian scheme of world history, the bulk of the 14 extant books is devoted to Old Testament history. But in addition to Ninus and Semiramis in Book 3 we also find a book on Alexander (10) and two on Roman history (11 and 14). The Christian element is certainly strong. The style of many passages recalls that of patristic homilies, with its insistent parallelism, paradox and apostrophes of God's unfathomable wisdom. Were it not for its peculiar alphabetic conceit, one could almost believe that the work was composed as a series of sermons. Yet the *De aetatibus* is also a highly self-conscious literary construct. In the midst of the homilectic style we also encounter passages that recall more closely the Martianean prose of the *Mitologiae* prologue. A good example is the description of the burning bush:

Extemplo Sinai montis caligantibus nebulis aestuans vapor et tonitruali mugitu rugientia cavernosi montis arcana pavidos divinitatis testabantur adventus; ignis quoque hilario remigamine coruscantior crispatis anhelo vibramine ligulis virentes rubi ramulos innocua cursilitate lambebat et divinis gressibus vernularem praebens obsequium cum herbis ludibundus innoxiiis praelambitionibus crispabatur.²⁰⁵

On a sudden, smoke blazing out of the dark clouds of Mount Sinai and the cavernous mountain's chasms, roaring with thunderous bellowing, attested the terrible advent of the Lord; and flame, bright with joyous movement, its tongues flickering with vaporous shimmering, licked with harmless rapidity at the blooming branches of a bush, and offering humble obedience to God's footsteps flickered with harmless licking as it played with the foliage.

²⁰³ Fulg., *Cont.*, p. 103.7ff.: *Ad haec ille subridens: 'Si, inquit, inter tantas Stoicas veritates aliquid etiam Epicureum non desipissem, paganus non essem ... neque enim hoc pacto in tuis libris conductus narrator accessi, ut id quod sentire me oportuerat disputarem et non ea potius quae senseram lucidarem.'*

²⁰⁴ cf. e.g. S. Lerer, *Boethius and Dialogue* (Princeton, NJ, 1985), p. 68: '[Fulgentius] accomplishment lies in subtly readjusting the place of classical literature in an insecure Christian world.'

²⁰⁵ Fulg., *Aet.*, 6 p. 148.4.

Analysis of the vocabulary is revealing. *Coruscans* and *crispare* are primarily poetic. *Tonitrualis* and *cavernosus* are both rare. *Vibramen* is found only once elsewhere (at Apul., *Met.*, 6.15.5). *Cursilitas*, *praelambitio*, *remigamen* and *vernularis* are attested only in Fulgentius. A far cry indeed from the *sermo humilis* of scripture!

CONCLUSIONS: FULGENTIUS AND 'AFRICAN' LITERATURE

The characteristics we have examined above are not found in all North African authors at this period. Nor are they confined to North Africa. In many ways, Martianus, Dracontius, the *Latin Anthology* poets, Corippus and Fulgentius have more in common with Ennodius or Venantius Fortunatus than they do with Victor of Vita or Fulgentius of Ruspe. Under these circumstances, it is fair to ask whether we are really talking about a specifically 'African' phenomenon at all. Are we not simply falling into the same trap as the exponents of *Africitas* – arbitrarily labelling as 'African' or 'Vandalic' features that are attested far more widely? To some extent, perhaps. Yet I think there are also some factors that distinguish this group of African writers from their Gaulish or Italian contemporaries.

One is their insularity. With a few exceptions their reading consists of the classic poets (from Vergil and Ovid to Claudian and Sedulius) ... and one another. Even the exceptions (Apuleius, Petronius, Tiberianus, Optatianus Porfirius) look like 'cult' authors, perhaps not much read elsewhere. There is little sign that they were aware of what was going on in other regions, either in literary or political terms. The culture of Vandal Africa is focused inward in a way that that of contemporary Gaul or Italy is not. It is also a curiously timeless culture. These writers show little interest in the past, even the recent past. History for them was Orosius, Rufinus' translation of Eusebius, and the moralizing exempla picked up in the rhetor's classroom. Vandal Carthage never produced a Gregory of Tours or a Cassiodorus – not even a Jordanes. To the extent that it was recorded at all, the Vandals' history was written by a Greek (Procopius), and a Spaniard (Isidore of Seville). In this sense, and for all its oddness, Fulgentius's *De aetatibus* is entirely typical: a 'history' filled with stylistic flourishes and rhetorical exempla, but strikingly little information.

The other feature that distinguishes this culture is its indifference to theology and to the Church as an institution. All of these men must have been professing Christians, and the sincerity of Dracontius' faith, at least, is impossible to doubt. Yet few followed the ecclesiastical career track embraced by their counterparts elsewhere in the Latin West. Instead they seem to have been *grammatici* (Felicianus, Corippus, Fulgentius' dedicatee Calcidius), advocates (Dracontius, perhaps Martianus and Luxurius), laymen of independent means (Coronatus?) – even a Vandal nobleman (Sigisteus). The few clerics we encounter (Parthemius, Catus, the unnamed deacon of the *Continetia*) belong to the lower ranks of the

ecclesiastical hierarchy, and their devotion may have been as shallow as that of the ingenuous Flavius Felix. None of these writers show much interest in theology. In many cases we cannot even determine whether they were Catholics or Arians – or merely blew with the prevailing winds. Gaulish authors like Avitus or Claudianus Mamertus, who combined an ornate literary style with a strong theological commitment, have no North African counterparts.

Why is this? It may be that the Vandal rulers' intolerance of dissent made it hard for Catholics to combine literary aspirations with theological interests. African intellectuals had to choose between two mutually exclusive models: were they to follow Luxorius or Fulgentius of Ruspe? To be a Sidonius or an Avitus in this society was not an option. For the authors we have been examining, the choice was clear. The details of the Son's relation to the Father, however fascinating, were not worth the disruption of productive relationships with Vandal patrons. This attitude carried over to some extent to the Byzantine period. Corippus' *Iohannis* studiously ignores the 'Three Chapters' controversy that divided his African compatriots from their Byzantine rulers.²⁰⁶

These two characteristics – insularity and secularity – may explain a curious generic gap. We have noted the lack of historiography. But why is it that Vandal North Africa produced only one extant letter collection (that of Fulgentius of Ruspe and his associates) to set beside the collections of Sidonius, Ruricius, Avitus, Faustus of Riez, Ennodius, and others?²⁰⁷ Accidents of transmission may be partly to blame. No Vandal counterparts to Cassiodorus' *Variae* have survived, but they must have existed. And the exchange between Parthemius and Sigisteus shows that the tradition of Symmachus was not yet dead. But the gap may also reflect basic differences between the *literati* of Vandal Carthage and their counterparts elsewhere. Living as they did in the same city, they had no need of the epistolary networks that connected far-flung Gaulish bishops, and no investment in the ecclesiastical issues that preoccupied such men. Their world was still the world of Ausonius – the world of the court, not the church – and for them the *carmen*, not the *epistula*, was the medium of exchange.

That world could endure, for a time, in the artificial atmosphere of Vandal Carthage. But it did not long survive the Byzantine reconquest. Corippus made the jump to Constantinople, with some success. What happened to Fulgentius we do not know. His works, with their intellectual frivolity, their elaborate and contorted prose, their ostentatious quotations and literary allusions, are in all likelihood the last representatives of this curious and ornamental culture.

²⁰⁶ cf. Cameron, 'Byzantine Africa: the Literary Evidence', p. 41f. and A. Cameron, 'Corippus's *Iohannis*. Epic of Byzantine Africa', in F. Cairns (ed.), *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar*, 4 (Liverpool, 1984), 167–80, repr. in her *Changing Cultures in Early Byzantium* (Aldershot, 1996).

²⁰⁷ For the letters of Fulgentius of Ruspe as representative of this tradition cf. S. T. Stevens, 'The Circle of Bishop Fulgentius', *Traditio*, 38 (1982), pp. 327–41.

Chapter 6

Vandal Poets in their Context

Judith W. George

Many scholars to date have seen the poets of Vandal Africa as somewhat isolated and bereft, as cultural orphans, or as struggling against great odds to maintain the traditions of Latin literature.

Even under the Vandals, whom they looked down upon as barbarians, a group of poets wrote for readers and listeners who loved poetry, whether or not their ears were attuned to the nuances of Latin pronunciation. These poets looked to the past for their models and wrote in the tradition of their predecessors; perhaps this was their refuge and fixed point in a changing world, as all was tottering and crumbling about them.¹

The aim of this chapter is to suggest that Vandal poetry, far from being the fragile and introverted preoccupation of a threatened minority of Romans, repressed by Vandal overlords, was instead poetry in a social context with which the poets were interacting positively in a way which we can identify and assess, despite the limitations of surviving evidence. The thesis is that these poems are representative of the same evolutionary phase as Latin poetry in other parts of the Roman world, as Germanic and Romano-African cultures intermingled and the Latin literary tradition found new life and changed modes of expression. The following pages will explore the possibility that we can see more than a huddle of introverted poets behind these North African poems; that we can see through the poems something of the cultural context of Vandal North Africa, of the values and attitudes of the society, and the relationship between poets and patrons. It will be suggested that the poems and their poets are an integral part of that society, and embody the kind of cultural adjustments which are found in other Roman provinces, as they were assimilated by – and assimilate – an invading people.

To sketch the historical and social context of this poetry, Vandal North Africa was a country which had been rich and culturally diverse up to the time of its conquest by the Vandals. Carthage was a magnificent city, with great public buildings, temples and churches, a circus, amphitheatre and theatre, one of the most sumptuous public baths in the empire – all built of exotic and magnificent materials.² Remains of equally splendid towns, villas and suburban homes have

¹ M. Rosenblum, *Luxorius: A Latin Poet Among the Vandals* (New York and London, 1961), p. 25.

² See G. G. Lapeyre and A. Pellegrin, *Carthage latine et chrétienne* (Paris, 1950); C. Picard, *Carthage* (Paris, 1951).

been found throughout North Africa, with mosaics, porticoes, colonnades and formal gardens to rival the best in Italy. The effect of the Vandal occupation is represented as the reverse of Augustus' impact on Rome; they found it made of marble,³ and left it a pile of bricks. But reports of such destruction are arguably much exaggerated. The internal evidence of the Vandal poets themselves speaks of the continuation of elaborate villas in the Roman fashion, of theatre and amphitheatre, and of public libraries. Luxorius writes in time-honoured fashion to his little book of epigrams, consoling it in case it meets with scorn when it is launched 'in the homes of the great and the public bookshelves of the noble forum'.⁴ As well as numerous references throughout the *Anthologia Latina* to villas, mosaics and fountains, Florentinus sings the praises of Thrasamund, and pays tribute to his restoration of Carthage – *Carthago studiis, Carthago ornata magistris*.⁵ The king's construction of magnificent baths is praised by Felix,⁶ and in Poem 90 Luxorius compliments Hilderic on building a magnificent edifice.⁷ The destruction of the Roman cities and imperial buildings of North Africa was not the work of the Vandals, but of their Byzantine conquerors and the African tribes during the expulsion of the Vandals in 534, and by the Arabs in later centuries.

The rich cultural and literary life of North Africa focused on the great centres of learning, such as Carthage, Cirta, Theveste, and many others, all drawing upon the network of local schools which flourished in the smallest towns,⁸ fuelled by the people's passion for learning. North Africa challenged, if it did not surpass, Rome, as a centre of culture and learning; the home, in particular, of celebrated grammarians, rhetoricians, advocates, and theologians.⁹

Once the Vandals had consolidated and stabilized their hold over the former Roman provinces, they appear to have been content to leave the Roman administration to continue to a great extent, retaining Latin as the official language, and even adopting titles such as 'proconsul' for officials at the court in Carthage.¹⁰ Over the hundred years and more of their occupation of these provinces, they succeeded in using to their advantage the weaknesses of both Rome and Byzantium to establish a stranglehold over the grain-rich islands and the commercial traffic of the Mediterranean, marrying into the royal families of both centres of power.

³ See E. Albertini, *L'Afrique Romaine* (Algiers, 1955), p. 57; E. S. Bouchier, *Life and Letters in Roman Africa* (Oxford, 1913), p. 4.

⁴ AL R.289 (S.284); ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 3.1–2, pp. 112–3;

⁵ AL R.376 (S.371), tr. in F. M. Clover, 'Carthage and the Vandals', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Excavations at Carthage VII* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1982). And cf. AL R.371 (S.366), tr. in F. M. Clover, 'Felix Karthago', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 40 (1986).

⁶ AL R.210–213 (S.201–4).

⁷ AL R.203 (S.194) ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 90, pp. 164–5.

⁸ See G. Boissier, *La fin du paganisme* (Paris, 1922), pp. 145–218; H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'Éducation dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1948), pp. 359–83.

⁹ Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, pp. 20–24.

¹⁰ See Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 228–29, 233–52.

Against this background, we may ask whether the learning and literary culture of the North African provinces came to an abrupt halt with the invasions of the Vandals, relapsing into a condition of suspended animation. Or was the period of Vandal occupation – brought to an sharp and brutal end with their destruction at the hands of Justinian's forces – a transitional period of cultural adaptation, moving towards a new identity, with the potential to challenge the emerging European cultures of the Visigoths or the Franks as seriously as Carthage had once challenged Rome?

This chapter will consider aspects of Vandal poetry, not in a context informed solely by what we know of the Vandals and of the Romans in North Africa, but in a wider context informed by what we know of the process of cultural adaptation and adjustment between another Germanic *gens* and the Roman population. The point of widening the scope of exploration and analysis thus is to establish what we can properly ask of the evidence we have for these North African poets; and also to suggest a valid approach to gain answers to several questions which remain unanswerable otherwise. These are questions such as: were these poets writing for their own amusement or satisfaction, or for that of patrons? Were they writing in a literary ghetto, detached from the rest of the Roman literary world, barred by conquerors from easy exchange and dialogue with friends and colleagues elsewhere in the Mediterranean? Were their patrons Vandals or Romans? And, if Vandals, did they have any true appreciation of Latin verse? Indeed, could some of the writers have been Vandals themselves? What can we deduce from the verse about the interests and values of the culture the poets worked in? Within the scope of the present chapter, it is not possible, of course, to answer all these questions exhaustively; but hopefully it can be established that answers are possible.

In setting out on this exploration, and seeking a new perspective from which to view these poets, the point of comparison will be the Romano-Frankish culture of the sixth century, and in particular the work of the Latin poet, Venantius Fortunatus. The premise in proposing this 'compare and contrast' exercise is that there are commonalities in the two contexts which make the process a valid, and indeed, an illuminating one. Both peoples, the Franks and the Vandals, came from the north-east, moved down into Europe or beyond, and settled. The Franks moved more slowly, with a longer period for acclimatization to Roman *mores* and language, for gaining an appreciation of the implications for their exercise of power of the use of Latin, of a more sophisticated and written legal system, and of the practical benefits of roads, villas and so on.¹¹ The Vandals, by contrast, moved relatively swiftly across Europe, stayed only briefly in Spain, and then, under the inspired leadership of Geiseric, crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to gain command of the Roman provinces of North Africa.

Both Vandals and Franks took advantage of the existing Roman administrative structures to underpin their own continued hierarchies of power, and to create a

¹¹ See I. N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (New York, 1994), pp. 1–87 and R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (California and Oxford, 1985), pp. 7–56.

stable environment within which two peoples could co-exist. The process of stabilization in Merovingian Gaul was a longer-lasting process, inevitably becoming more complex as the political and social climate evolved. But even in North Africa, within a comparatively short time, there is no evidence of any serious disruption. There were palace feuds and conspiracies,¹² but no sign of any mass unrest by the Romano-Africans against their Vandal overlords.

Merovingian Gaul, of course, is largely a familiar world to modern scholars, thanks to the voluminous and engaging writing of Gregory of Tours, Fortunatus himself, Paul the Deacon and a raft of other letters, charters and Church Council records. As a result, it has been a relatively straightforward process to locate the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus within its cultural context, and to analyse how the poet reflects the values and interests of his patrons, how he intervenes in political issues, and the range of relationships he has with Gallo-Romans and Franks. We can see through his poetry the reflection of beliefs of that age, the development of the ideology of kingship, the increasing cultural fusion of the two races, and, at the same time, the values each clings to as the heart of their identity. To a significant extent, we can trace the process of assimilation and integration.¹³

Such close analysis is rather more difficult in the case of the Latin poets of Vandal Africa, because patterns of source survival have been so different, but analysis at a more general level is certainly feasible. The poet holds a mirror up to his patron in Merovingian Gaul or in Vandal North Africa, and reflects what the patron values. He writes about the detail of daily life which interests or amuses his audience, as well as himself. Scholars have often seen these poets as writers without a context. Comment is made on their choice of subject, of register and reference, as though they were indeed only writing for their own pleasure, or that of a small group of kindred spirits. The observation regarding 'Luxorius, who is most unkind to those afflicted with human failings and physical defects ...',¹⁴ is an obvious example of this pattern of thought. The values underlying such mockery, however, are as likely to be those of the society within which the poet worked, and of his patrons in particular, as those of the earlier Roman poets, Martial or Juvenal, were. The objects of praise or interest inform us equally of the pleasures and enthusiasms of a wider audience. The poems can thus be used – with due caution – to hold up a mirror to the poet, but also to the wider society in which he worked, to give snapshots of life and values, and to create some sense of how the earlier Romano-African culture developed into a culture which embraced both Romans and Vandals.

If the textual historical record for Vandal Africa is occasionally fragmentary, there is a richness in the North African sources which is not found for the Gallic world. The profusion of mosaics from private villas and public places, for example, illustrates the well-appointed and well-watered country dwellings of the ruling

¹² Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 255–6.

¹³ See J. W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus. A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford, 1992), *passim*.

¹⁴ Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, p. 195.

elites, the elegant horses, the pet animals and the fierce chases across country after boars or leopards.¹⁵ This visual context simply does not survive from the Frankish world, even where it existed in the first place. The Gallo-Roman and Frankish visual and artistic environment has to be largely deduced from references and descriptions. There are many visual references or resonances in Fortunatus' poetry – the description of a glorious new cathedral,¹⁶ inscriptions for paintings illustrating the life of St. Martin in Tours,¹⁷ or suggestions of the visual paraphernalia of an *adventus* ceremony.¹⁸ We have only the crudest idea what this complementary dimension to the poetry could have been. The resonances in the North African poetry can be easily picked up from a wide array of such source material.

The starting point for an analysis is an understanding of the role of a poet in the classical world. This had always covered a remarkable territory: personal and occasional poetry for the amusement of the poet and his friends, or his patron; more formal poetry for an epitaph, a victory at the games, a consolation; and poetry as a public medium of political influence and comment – satire, panegyric and *gratiarum actiones*. A poet was not a garret dweller, writing with Romantic inspiration. A poet was part of a literary tradition that was an active and public one. A poet had a part to play in a formal occasion, in delivering a panegyric for the *adventus* of a ruler, for example. He also graced and added lustre to a more personal event. Without such a contribution, all aspects of life, public and private, were shorn of an important element of articulation of values and reflection – the poet is the voice of a family, or a king, or a bereft spouse.

Fortunatus brought this dimension to Frankish/Gallo-Roman life. His contributions across a remarkable range of genres were not only valued by his wide range of patrons, but they were also his contribution, in the traditional voice of a classical poet, to the shaping of life and events over nearly half a century in Gaul, in political, social and personal terms. Earlier assessments of Fortunatus saw him as the opportunistic bard, writing for an ale-swilling audience of illiterate barbarians.¹⁹ More recent work has analysed his work in his contemporary context, and argued that there is a subtle and complex relationship between Fortunatus and the literary tradition upon which he drew; between the poet and his patrons, clerics or secular magnates, male and female; and between the poet's work and his visual context.²⁰

¹⁵ See, for example, M. Yacoub, *La musée du Bardo* (Tunis, 1996), Figs 66, 102, 104, and so on.

¹⁶ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, III.6.

¹⁷ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, X.6.

¹⁸ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, II.6; VI.2. For discussion, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 40, 46.

¹⁹ See, for example, S. Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (London, 1926), p. 333.

²⁰ For more sensitive interpretations of Fortunatus' work, see esp. B. Brennan, 'The career of Venantius Fortunatus', *Traditio*, 41 (1985), pp. 49–78; George, *Venantius Fortunatus*; P. Godman, *Poets and Emperors. Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 1–37.

Analysis of the poems in their context holds up a mirror to the ways and values of the times. The cluster of poems for Bishop Leontius of Bordeaux, for example, tell us a great deal about the values of the bishop and his high-born wife, Placidina, and their relationship to the poet.²¹ The complex resonances of his work for Radegund and Agnes in the community of the Holy Cross at Poitiers reflect their learning and literary interests,²² as do his poems to Duke Lupus,²³ Queen Ultrogotha,²⁴ the bereaved husband of Vilithuta,²⁵ Gogo, the *maior domus*,²⁶ and many others. By contrast, the banal or pedestrian tone of tributes to other patrons can well be attributed to their lack of cultural sophistication or empathy with the poet.²⁷

The poems of Fortunatus, therefore, can be used not only as direct evidence for a way of life (building villas, for example, or a passion for hunting), but also, more subtly, for insight into the values and attitudes of his patrons towards Roman culture in general. They reveal the ways in which that culture was changed and adapted by the presence of the poems themselves. They cast light upon the level of sophistication and education of their recipients, upon the relationship between the poet and his friends and patrons, and also upon Fortunatus' personal standing in the secular and ecclesiastical circles of the time.

Our knowledge of the poets of Vandal Africa is skeletal by comparison. There is no single poet who has a surviving body of work with anything like the range or the sheer quantity of that of Fortunatus, or was written over a comparable length of time. The work of Blossius Aemilius Dracontius is the most substantial, and he is the poet we know most about, from internal references and from annotations on various manuscripts.²⁸ He was working under the reign of Gunthamund (484–96) who imprisoned him at one point. The sparse remains of the works of other poets who wrote during this period survive in the *Anthologia Latina*, a collection of African poems made first by Burmann, revised by Meyer in 1835 and Riese in 1869 and 1894, and known also in Baehrens' version of 1882.²⁹ It is not known, however,

²¹ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, I.8–20. For discussion, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 108–13; J. W. George, 'Portraits of two Merovingian bishops in the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 13 (1987), pp. 189–205.

²² See George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 161–77.

²³ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VII.7–9; For discussion, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 132–36.

²⁴ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VI.6; For discussion, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 101–5.

²⁵ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, IV.26; For discussion, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 93–4.

²⁶ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VII.1–4; For discussion, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 136–40.

²⁷ For example, Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VII.16; For discussion, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 82–3.

²⁸ See C. Moussy and C. Camus, *Dracontius Œuvres* 1 (Paris, 1985), pp. 1–2. On background to Dracontius' career and his relationship with Vandal patrons, see Chapter 7 by Andy Merrills in the present volume.

²⁹ See E. Baehrens, *Poetae Latinae Minores*. 5 vols (Leipzig, 1879–83, 1910–23, 1930); P. Burmann, *Anthologia Veterum Latinorum Epigrammatum et Poematum sive Catalecta*

when these poets lived and worked, or much more about them than their names: Avitus, Bonosus, Calbulus, Cato, Coronatus, Felix, Florentinus, Lindinus, Luxorius, Modestinus, Octavianus, Ponnanus, Regianus, Tuccianus, and Vincentinus. Past scholars have propounded theories about the compiler of the collection, his ethnicity, and even the date of compilation, with passionate certainty.³⁰ On examination, however, these arguments are weak, beg countless questions, and often depend on dubious grounds – that ‘a Vandal would not have known enough’ to compile the collection, for example.³¹

Many of the questions listed above, about the Vandals and their relationship with the Latin poets, start from a presupposition about the interest of Vandals in Latin culture and literature and their level of education. They are often seen as overlords who let the Romans get on rather surreptitiously with their previous way of life, and interfered occasionally to whip them into line. The quotation at the beginning of this chapter suggests some kind of ghetto situation and mentality for the poets of Vandal Africa, a retreat into a more comfortable past. It is true that these writers looked to the past for their models, but it would be a matter for note if they had not, for the literary tradition created by their predecessors always permeated the work of Latin poets. We cannot deduce from this characteristic that they necessarily felt that their world was crumbling about them, or that they were in a particularly precarious and threatened position.³² It is illuminating to look at some of the evidence, at what we would deduce from it in the Frankish context, and what we might therefore argue for in the Vandal context.

Life in the country was important for wealthy Romans, both in the domesticated pursuits of leisure in an elegant villa, and in the excitement of the hunt. Procopius reports the Vandals as having taken with enthusiasm to the Roman lifestyle, with villas, games and hunting,³³ and the Franks apparently shared these enthusiasms.³⁴ Fortunatus wrote three poems for Bishop Leontius about the villas he restored in the Bordeaux countryside.³⁵ These are poems which, with their Vergilian echoes of a classical *locus amoenus*, hold up a mirror to the bishop’s pride in his *Romanitas*, to his passion for living the way his Roman ancestors did in having his country retreat,

Poetarum Latinorum in VI Libros Digesta. 2 vols (Amsterdam, 1759, 1773); H. Meyer, *Anthologia Veterum Latinorum Epigrammatum et Poematum*. 2 vols (Leipzig, 1835); A. Riese, *Anthologia Latina sive Poesis Latinae Supplementum. Fasciculus I: Libri Salmasiani Aliorumque Carmina* (Leipzig, 1869); *Fasciculus II: Reliquorum librorum carmina* (Leipzig, 1890). See Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, pp. 25–35 for an excellent discussion of the compilation.

³⁰ See Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, pp. 25–35.

³¹ See Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, p. 31, paraphrasing Otto Schubert, *Quaestionum de Anthologia Codicis Salmasiani. Pars I. De Luxorio* (Weimar, 1875), pp. 17–19.

³² See note 1 above. On the deference of poets (particularly in North Africa) to provincial literary traditions, see Chapter 5 by Gregory Hays, in the present volume.

³³ Procopius, *BV.*, II, 6.6; for comment, see Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 228–30.

³⁴ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 11–18.

³⁵ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, I.18–20. For comment, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 108–13.

complete with mosaics, fountains and pleasure gardens. Fortunatus also addressed to the Frankish Duke Lupus a complex poem of thanks, which used the imagery of landscape on several levels to express his devotion, with erudite allusions which compliment Lupus' learning.³⁶

As in Fortunatus' poems on life in the country, there are sophisticated classical resonances in writing for Vandal patrons within the *Anthologia Latina*. Poem 64, to an unknown patron, celebrates the conquest of the wilderness by the technological marvels of a palace with running hot water, in terms similar to Fortunatus' celebration of Leontius' civilizing effect on the countryside. The audience chamber of Hilderic is celebrated in a poem which uses the *topos* of the 'world upside-down'.³⁷ Fridamal, a young Vandal, is represented by Luxorius as having created a *locus amoenus* with conscious classical resonance – a tower and statue of Diana, and beautiful rooms adorned with mosaics.³⁸ The poem is full of echoes of Vergil and Statius,³⁹ and mirrors the image of Fridamal's valour and success as a hunter depicted in the mosaic *pièce de résistance*, which portrayed him in glorious action. The Frankish magnate, Gogo, is similarly celebrated as a hunter by Fortunatus;⁴⁰ but in the case of the Frankish poem, we do not have any surviving mosaics to suggest the visual reference of the poem, as we do in the North African case.⁴¹ Fridamal is complimented for the reverence which even the sea birds show him, in a setting graced by idyllic *nemora*.⁴² This compliment is not as extravagant as the portrayal of Gogo as a second Orpheus; yet it is a classical *topos*, which flatters its addressee only if he can be flattered by inclusion in such a world.⁴³

Luxorius' Poem 46, addressed to Eugetus on the subject of his garden, describes another *locus amoenus* set in the world of Vergil and Statius.⁴⁴ Oageis, a member of the royal family, is complimented on the rich resource of his medicinal herb garden in Poem 83 – a garden which could meet the demands of any prescription from Apollo or Asclepius. It has been suggested that Eugetus and Oageis are one and the same man.⁴⁵ Given the different resonances of these poems, however, and

³⁶ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VII.8. For discussion, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 132–6.

³⁷ AL R.203 (S.194), ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 90, pp. 164–5. For the *topos*, see E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. W. R. Trask (London, 1979), pp. 94–8.

³⁸ AL R.304 (S.299), ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 18, pp. 122–3.

³⁹ Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, pp. 189–92.

⁴⁰ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VII.4.

⁴¹ See, for example, Yacoub, *La musée du Bardo*, Figs. 102, 113.

⁴² AL R.305.6 (S.300.6) ed and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 19, pp. 122–3; and cf. AL R.291–2 (S.286–7), ed and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 5 and 6, pp. 114–15 for the same *topos* of wild animals obeying a human master. See also Rosenblum's comments at p. 192.

⁴³ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VII.1.

⁴⁴ AL R.332 (S.327), ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 46, pp. 138–9.

⁴⁵ AL R.369 (S.364), ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 83, pp. 160–161, and see his comments at p. 211. On Oageis' Royal connections, compare R.345.3 (S.340.3), ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 59.3, pp. 146–7.

the number of garden representations in surviving mosaics, there is no reason to come to this conclusion. We therefore have yet one more rich and powerful Vandal, who can be complimented through praise of his achievement in terms of the Roman literary tradition and a Roman way of life. If Eugetus is a Roman, moreover, then it is interesting that there is no apparent distinction between Roman and Vandal reflected in the poems, in way of life, power, wealth or aspiration. The poem by Fortunatus on Queen Ultrogotha's garden,⁴⁶ the Easter poem to Bishop Felix of Nantes celebrating the resurrection of nature⁴⁷ and those on resplendent altar flowers or humble posies of violets for Radegund and Agnes,⁴⁸ are the Gallic parallels, in which the subject matter reveals a shared and vivid appreciation by poet and patron. The care and subtlety of these compositions suggest a circle of patrons for whom the resonances and allusions of the verse are significant.

Oageis is also the recipient of a poem in another genre – a consolation on the death of his little daughter, Damira (Poem 59). In its form – *laudatio*, *lamentatio* and *consolatio* – in its traditional motifs, its use of tragic irony, and its echoes of Horace and Vergil, this is a well-crafted classical consolation.⁴⁹ The gentle and charming characteristics attributed to Damira anticipate those evoked by Fortunatus in his eulogy on the young bride, Vilithuta.⁵⁰ In his consolations and epitaphs, the Gallic poet drew heavily upon the traditional forms and on both classical and Christian motifs, but with an inventiveness and creativity which none of the North African poets display to the same extent. In both cases, however, the undiluted use of Latin conventions implies that this is a valid form of consolation for a non-Latin patron; the careful detail of allusion and atmosphere set poet and patron within the same cultural understanding.

The Vandal poets, Luxorius and Dracontius, and Fortunatus all composed *epithalamia* for their Germanic patrons. Fortunatus celebrated the prestigious wedding of Sigibert and Brunhild in 567.⁵¹ Dracontius composed two such poems, one for the double wedding of brothers, and a second for the marriage of John to Vitula.⁵² These poems, too, draw heavily on Latin literary tradition in their structure, their form and motifs.⁵³ Fortunatus' poem has perhaps the more political subtlety and poetical skill, Dracontius' the more intriguing autobiographical hints. Luxorius draws upon the traditions of the past in a more literal sense for the wedding of the *vir clarissimus et spectabilis*, Fridus. He writes a cento, and, as Rosenblum observes, not

⁴⁶ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VI.6.

⁴⁷ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, III.9.

⁴⁸ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VIII.6–7.

⁴⁹ R.345 (S.340), ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 59, pp. 146–7.

⁵⁰ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, IV.26.39–40; cf. *Carm.*, IV.16, 17.

⁵¹ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VI.1. For discussion, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 153–7.

⁵² Dracontius, *Rom.*, 6, 7.

⁵³ For discussion, see C. Morelli, 'L'epitalamio nella tarda poesia latina', *Studi Italiani di filologia classica*, 18 (1910), pp. 319–432.

a very deft one at that.⁵⁴ Again, as in the case of the consolations, the premise underlying both poems is that of a shared culture and of a patron who understands and values that which the poem, and the literary tradition it continues, have to offer. Dracontius attests to Vandals and Romans meeting to listen to Felicianus, his teacher.⁵⁵ His later poems reveal that interest translated into patronage.

Shared values are very apparent in the many references to pastimes and amusements, including games in the amphitheatres, pantomimes, and racing. Luxorius celebrates the winning streak of a charioteer, jeers at a fat falconer, mocks a vicious gambler and the dwarf pantomimist who plays Helen.⁵⁶ He reflects the well-attested interest in magic and mentions eyes painted on a hunter's hand in his portrait, to give him supernatural accuracy, and the painting of Fortune over the door of racing stables.⁵⁷ He also celebrates the building of a new amphitheatre on a country estate.⁵⁸ All of these are topics which are represented widely in the visual arts.⁵⁹ Since, on Procopius' evidence, the Vandals had adopted the Romans' tastes in these pursuits, this occasional poetry would seem to reflect their interests and enthusiasms, as Fortunatus' verses for inscription on drinking cups do for his Gallo-Roman and Frankish friends and patrons.⁶⁰

These examples should be sufficient to establish that there are commonalities between the two societies, and to suggest strongly that the invasion of the Vandals was not the end of civilization as the Romans knew it. Procopius was right. The Vandals rapidly adopted with enthusiasm the ways of life, the pastimes and the pleasures of the Romans, part of which was the contribution of poetry to public and private occasions. We have evidence that poets continued to play their traditional role in celebrating formal occasions or in writing occasional verse. They were working within the traditional literary genres and drawing upon the Latin tradition, but, as in the case of Fortunatus, they adapted that tradition to their own circumstances and to the interests of their patrons and society around them. Indeed, there is a substantial enough corpus of poems which depend upon shared literary interests and understanding to evoke, with the support of the parallel Merovingian examples, Vandal patrons who are seriously engaged with Latin culture, as well as with the practicalities of power.

Yet Dracontius was writing in the 480s, and Luxorius eulogizes the works of Hilderic, in the 520s. Both wrote within a hundred years of the Vandals being a tribe

⁵⁴ AL R.18 (S. n/a) ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 91, pp. 164–9, and see his comments at pp. 251–2.

⁵⁵ Dracontius. *Rom.*, *Praefatio*, 1.12–15.

⁵⁶ AL R.293 (S.288), R.300 (S.295), R.310 (S.305), R.323 (S.318), ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 7, 14, 24, 37, pp. 114–15, 118–19, 126–27, 134–5 respectively.

⁵⁷ AL R.334–5 (S.329–30), R.312–3 (S.307–8), ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 48, 49, 26, 27, pp. 140–141, 128–9 respectively. On Luxorius' interest in magic, see Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 128–30.

⁵⁸ AL R.346 (S.341), ed. and tr. by Rosenblum, *Luxorius*, 60, pp. 146–7.

⁵⁹ See Yacoub, *La musée du Bardo*, Figs 86, 88, 105, 108–9.

⁶⁰ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VII.24.

on the move. The Franks, by contrast, had steady contact with the Romans from the third century, many of them serving as auxiliaries in the fourth century. Clovis was an early convert to Catholicism. His grandson, Chilperic, who died in 584, had an active interest in theology, wrote second-rate Latin poetry, composed hymns and tried to revise the alphabet.⁶¹ Just over 70 years after the Vandal invasion, Thrasamund surrounded himself with theologians, rhetoricians and writers. He invited the Catholic polemicist, Fulgentius, to court,⁶² just as Chilperic engaged in theological debate with Gregory of Tours.⁶³

North Africa under the Vandals thus provided a rich cultural context for poets and poetry. The Vandals took over and adapted the administrative framework of the former province, preserving Roman titles and their organizational structure.⁶⁴ The direct evidence speaks clearly of their similar immersion in the other aspects of Roman society. The indirect evidence of the poems, supported by the parallel of Frankish development, suggests that the vigorous cultural life of Roman North Africa continued. It had perhaps been slowed or redirected by the Vandal presence, but there was continuity, and a dynamic adaptation to changed circumstances. We could even argue for a society in a state of ongoing fusion which forged further ahead, and more rapidly, than that of the Franks and the Gallo-Romans. If that was the case, it was a remarkable achievement, ended tragically in the disruption and disappearance of the Vandal *gens*. The final and ironic blow has been for their name to be attached to a stereotype of destruction and barbarity.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Greg. Tur., *LH.*, V.44.

⁶² L. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen* (Leipzig, 1901, repr. Munich 1942), p. 189.

⁶³ Greg. Tur., *LH.*, VI.5.

⁶⁴ On Vandal integration with Romano-African social structures see the paper by Andreas Schwarcz in Chapter 2 of the present volume.

⁶⁵ See Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 59.

Chapter 7

The Perils of Panegyric: The Lost Poem of Dracontius and its Consequences¹

A. H. Merrills

Grant me forgiveness, put an end to my sufferings, free me from my chains, smash my rattling irons, banish my hunger, remove my thirst, restrain my anguish, indulge me for all the crimes I have committed. Have mercy on me, in long detention among those who plead amid the sufferings of each day.²

As one might expect of one of the foremost exponents of late Latin verse, Dracontius tugs persistently at the heart-strings of his readers. Although many of his Christian contemporaries faced their own eye-watering fates with rather more fortitude than did the fifth-century poet, it is hard not to feel considerable sympathy for Dracontius, languishing in a Vandal prison cell. While residing at the pleasure of King Gunthamund, and up to his release during the reign of Thrasamund, Dracontius produced a number of startling works, which marked a high point of late Latin poetic production in North Africa. Like Boethius a generation later, Dracontius seems to typify the irreconcilable differences between the Catholic intellectual and the Arian barbarian ruler, and encapsulates many of the myriad fascinations of the late antique period.

Unlike Boethius, however, and in striking contrast to the African confessors enumerated by Victor of Vita, the causes of Dracontius' sufferings are but poorly understood. As a result, a potentially valuable perspective upon the relations between Vandal and Romano-African in the fifth century is lost. It is known only that Gunthamund, who is commonly assumed to have been illiterate, took issue with a single poem composed by the writer, and threw the offender in gaol.³ His

¹ I am grateful to a number of people for valuable comments on early drafts of this chapter. Most notably Simon Loseby, Tom Penn, Rosamond McKitterick, Judith George and those who attended Richard Miles' *Vandal and Byzantine Africa* Colloquium at the Open University at Milton Keynes in June 2001.

² Dracontius, *De Laud*, 3.664–9: *Da mihi iam veniam, finem concede malorum, | vincula solve mea, stridentes frange catenas, | pelle famem, disclude sitim, compesce dolores, | omne quod admisi facinus crimenque relaxa. | Iam misere mei; custodia longa fatigat | inter anhelantes gemitus cladesque diurnas.*

³ On the life of the poet, compare *PLRE*, II., pp. 379–80; C. Moussy, 'Introduction', in C. Moussy and C. Camus (ed. and tr.), *Dracontius. Œuvres*. Tome I (Paris, 1985), pp. 7–31 and the excellent summary provided by J. M. Diaz de Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana. Estudio biográfico, introducción y edición crítica* (Santiago de Compostela, 1978), pp. 33–51.

successor Thrasamund then apparently freed Dracontius and welcomed the poet back into favour, to the extent that the writer seems to have composed a panegyric, again now lost, in honour of his royal saviour.⁴ If the nature of the fateful poem responsible for Dracontius' sufferings could be defined with confidence, considerable light might be cast upon the tensions within African society during a period of political, social and religious uncertainty. As it is, however, the modern scholar may catch only fragmentary glimpses of the likely form of this lost work, through the distorting mirror of the verses that Dracontius later composed in an effort to atone for his mistake. The first of these – the *Satisfactio* – is a long *apologia* dedicated both to the offended king, Gunthamund, and to God, in which Dracontius expounds upon his own folly and, more pointedly, upon the virtues of merciful rule. The second, *De Laudibus Dei* is a more obviously religious composition in three books, which includes a substantial hexameral section in praise of the Lord, as well as a more resigned account of Dracontius' own sufferings in prison.⁵ Two shorter *epithalamia*, dedicated to African aristocrats, also survive from this unhappy period, or shortly after, and both include brief assertions of the unbearable nature of the poet's ills.⁶

Despite these allusions, neither the recipient of Dracontius' lost poem nor the specific purpose of the verse has been identified with any degree of certainty. For the most part, scholars have implicitly accepted Dracontius' own statement that his lost work was written in a moment of personal irrationality, and have rarely considered the possible motives behind its composition.⁷ It is the purpose of this paper to re-consider this notorious *carmen ignotum* within the context of mid-Vandal Africa, and to suggest that the poem may have been composed at the instigation of the ruling Hasding house. The conclusions that follow are necessarily tentative, but it is hoped that they will provide a new perspective on a problem that has too frequently been clouded by a number of unfounded, or at best poorly-founded assumptions.

To my knowledge, every existing study of Dracontius has accepted the argument that the writer's fateful *carmen ignotum* was composed in honour of a foreign ruler and was intended in some way to express the writer's dissatisfaction with the Vandal regime in Africa.⁸ The nature of Dracontius' allusions to his work certainly

⁴ On the lost panegyric to Thrasamund, see M. Schanz, C. Hosius and G. Krueger, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur IV.2: Die Literatur des 5. und 6. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1920, repr., 1959), pp. 59–61.

⁵ Dracontius, *De Laud.*

⁶ Dracontius, *Rom.*, 6, 7.

⁷ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 27–8.

⁸ See, for example, D. F. Bright, *The Miniature Epic in Vandal Africa* (Norman/London, 1987), p. 16; Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, pp. 52–3; F. Chatillon, 'Dracontiana', *Revue du Moyen-Age Latin*, 8 (1952), pp. 194–6; F. M. Clover, 'The Symbiosis of Romans and Vandals in Africa', in E. K. Chrysos and A. Schwarcz (eds), *Das Reich und die Barbaren* (Vienna, 1989), repr. in his *Late Roman West and the Vandals*, p. 62; Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 288; Moussy, 'introduction', pp. 19–20; Pierre Riché, *Education*

support the assumption that the piece was indeed a panegyric; little else would explain the references to the *carmen* scattered throughout the writer's *oeuvre*. What is rather less certain, however, is the identity of the likely recipient of the poem. Like Boethius half a century later, Dracontius has been presented as a tortured Latin intellectual, casting around for a patron more sympathetic to his talents than the uneducated barbarian kings of his homeland. Different figures have been posited as the likely recipients of the work – from the emperors Anastasius and Zeno to Odovacer and Theoderic, the contemporary rulers of Italy – but all are figures far removed from the problematic politics of Vandal Africa. Admittedly, there would seem to be compelling reasons to make such an assumption. Dracontius himself refers to a *dominum mihi ... ignotum* – ‘a lord foreign to me’ – in one of his few specific references to the lost piece, and repeatedly bewails his failure to find more appropriate local patrons.⁹ Upon close investigation, however, it is difficult to associate Dracontius' lost work with any one of these figures, and still more of a challenge to reconcile the production of such a panegyric to a foreign ruler within the standard patterns of late antique poetic patronage.

As the host of different theories surrounding Dracontius' mysterious patron implies, no single solution to the problem is without its difficulties. Dracontius apparently produced his poem, was imprisoned for his trouble, and then composed two of his longest works – the *Satisfactio* and *De Laudibus Dei* – as well as at least one shorter piece, while incarcerated at the hands of Gunthamund, all before the death of the king in 496. As a result, both Theoderic, who only emerges as a possible recipient of Dracontius' verse after the assassination of Odovacer in 493, and Anastasius, who came to power in 491, make unlikely patrons, for simple chronological reasons.¹⁰ The dramatic difference in tone between the *Satisfactio* – in which the poet seems to betray an optimism at the likelihood of his release – and the more resigned attitude of *De Laudibus Dei* have led to the common supposition that the two were separated by some distance in time.¹¹ Even if Dracontius composed a poem in honour of either Theoderic or Anastasius immediately after their respective accessions to power, therefore (itself perhaps rather unlikely), and was then immediately imprisoned for his efforts, there would scarcely seem to have been enough time for the writer to complete his prison *oeuvre* before the accession of Thrasamund, and his consequent release.

Of still more importance is Dracontius' likely motive in the composition of this *carmen ignotum*. The loss of the text naturally makes the reconstruction of its

and Culture in the Barbarian West. From the Sixth through the Eighth Centuries, tr. J.J. Contreni (Columbia, SC, 1976). p. 55; Schanz et al., *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, p. 59; F. Vollmer, *Blossii Aemilii Dracontii Carmina*. MGH AA XIV. V. (Berlin, 1905), pp. VIII, 299–300.

⁹ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 94. See below for a full discussion of this passage.

¹⁰ Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, p. 57; Moussy, ‘introduction’, pp. 26–30.

¹¹ Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, pp. 83–9; D. F. Bright, ‘The Chronology of the Poems of Dracontius’, *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 50 (1999), p. 199.

intended function exceptionally difficult, but few entirely convincing explanations have been put forward to fill this vacuum. If, as was frequently supposed, Dracontius anticipated Boethius in making a plea to the empire to alleviate the sufferings of a Catholic region oppressed by the heretical barbarians, both his method and probable choice of patron pose difficulties.¹² Dracontius could, of course, have directed his appeal either to Constantinople or to the barbarian representatives of the empire in Italy, but neither location represented a sympathetic and ambitious stronghold of orthodoxy during the late fifth century. The promulgation of the *Henotikon* by Zeno in 482 would have alienated the emperor from Catholics in the West, and Italy offered still less favourable ground for an appeal of the kind.¹³ Although both Odovacer and Theoderic were more moderate in their Arianism than were the Vandal kings of the late fifth century, both remained estranged from the Catholic Church, and would thus have made improbable saviour figures for a society suffering under Arian persecution.

No less significantly, neither the Italian kings nor the Byzantine emperors were in a position to put any realistic military action against Africa into effect.¹⁴ Although the balance of power in the western Mediterranean certainly changed in the aftermath of Geiseric's death in 477, Vandal authority remained dominant in the region, and the Italian rulers continued to pay tribute in Sicily until Theoderic's accession.¹⁵ After the spectacular failure of the campaigns of 457 and 468, and the 'eternal peace' settlement of 474, moreover, Dracontius would surely have recognized the practical weaknesses of Constantinopolitan power, and the poet can have held few expectations of a spectacular imperial revival.¹⁶ Belisarius' African *Blitzkrieg* was, after all, still half a century away.

The content of Dracontius' extant verse, moreover, and the nature of his punishment, further suggest that the writer's offence was not one of political treason. Had Dracontius actively plotted against the Vandal regime, his sentence seems to have been remarkably light; Boethius, it might be remembered, was executed in the most brutal way for his own imperial sympathies.¹⁷ Dracontius, by contrast, was merely imprisoned. The recent suggestion that Dracontius may have had mixed Vandal and Roman heritage and hence earned relative clemency from the ruling house, offers a solution of sorts to one problem but scarcely a conclusive

¹² This is the thesis put forward by Vollmer, *Blossii Aemilii Dracontii Carmina*, pp. VII–VIII; for earlier scholarship on the same subject, see the discussion by Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, pp. 52–3.

¹³ Bright, 'Chronology', p. 195; Moussy, 'Introduction', p. 22.

¹⁴ Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, p. 78.

¹⁵ On the Vandal 'thalassocracy' in the Western Mediterranean, see Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 185–96. On Vandal authority in Sicily and relations with the Italian kingdoms, see F. M. Clover, 'A Game of Bluff: The Fate of Sicily After AD 476', *Historia*, 48.2 (1999), pp. 235–44.

¹⁶ On relations with Constantinople, see Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 199–205.

¹⁷ *Anonymous Valesianus*, in J. C. Rolfe (ed. and tr.), *Ammianus Marcellinus III*, LCL (Cambridge, MA, 1939), II.14.87; Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, p. 64.

one.¹⁸ Given the violent scalping supposedly meted out to Vandals who turned to Catholicism, Dracontius would have done well to get away with mere imprisonment for political treachery, whatever his parentage.¹⁹ Such an argument, moreover, does little more than intensify the mystery surrounding Dracontius' supposed decision to celebrate a ruler from beyond Africa.

Throughout the *Satisfactio* and *De Laudibus Dei*, the poet acknowledges his folly in composing his verse, but makes little reference to any global political issues, or to any religious justification for his writing. If Dracontius composed his lost work with the best interests of the African Church at heart, he seems remarkably silent on the issue. Indeed, throughout his prison poems, Dracontius' tone is of repentance, not only to Gunthamund, as might be expected, but also to God – a peculiar stance for one accused of standing by his religious feelings.

Both the *Satisfactio* and *De Laudibus Dei* are compositions of a profoundly religious nature, in which the writer makes his peace with God more urgently than with his temporal ruler, Gunthamund. His culpability is defined in terms of a betrayal of his faith, not political treachery, a point repeatedly demonstrated in the earlier poem:

I pray Thee, Almighty, Thee whose proper attribute is mildness, Who takest pleasure not in revenge, but in forgiveness, Whose holy Hand supports the hearts of rulers and who in love dost presently incline them whithersoever Thou dost decree. In Thy presence, first of all, I repent of that poem which in my rashness I foolishly composed, and this do I confess.²⁰

For want of a better alternative, modern studies have been content to assume that Dracontius merely invoked God as an aid to his pleas to Gunthamund. Indeed, the poet repeatedly implores his spiritual Lord to inspire his temporal master to appropriate mercy. Yet Dracontius frequently surpasses these boundaries, and loses himself in religious considerations.²¹ Famously, in the second book of *De Laudibus Dei*, he protests at length the orthodoxy of his own beliefs – a renunciation of heretical theology on the Trinity that seems strangely out of place in a poem nominally dedicated to a wronged Arian king.²² Bustamante has suggested that this emphasis may be explained by Dracontius' contrition at his apparent criticism of

¹⁸ For discussion, cf. Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, pp. 38–40 and the telling assertion of Chatillon, 'Dracontiana', p. 190: 'Romain d'Afrique ou Romain d'Italie, Dracontius est Romain ...'; Bright, 'Chronology', p. 196 supports the argument that Dracontius was a Vandal, following and expanding upon D. Kuijper, 'Varia dracontiana' (unpubl. Ph.D., The Hague, 1958), p. 9.

¹⁹ Vict. Vit., *HP*. II.9.

²⁰ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 101–06: *Te precor, Omnipotens, te quem decet esse benignum,|quem non ulla iuuat ultio, sed venia,|cuius sancta manus sustentat corda regentum|et pius inclinas mox ubicumque iubes.|Te coram primum me carminis ullius, ausu|quod male disposui, paenitet et fateor.*

²¹ A point noted with puzzlement by Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, p. 81.

²² Dracontius, *De Laud.*, 2.60–110; cf. W. H. Alexander, 'Studi Draconziani by D. Romano ...', *Classical Philology*, 56 (1961), p. 50 on Dracontius' Trinitarianism: 'it fairly drips from his lines ...'

the divinely-ordained political balance through an appeal to a foreign ruler, but the thematic consistency within the poet's work strongly suggests rather more serious motives.²³ Indeed, both the *Satisfactio* and *De Laudibus Dei* would seem to have been inspired by a desire to atone for a religious wrong that far surpassed a thoughtless challenge to the political status quo of the late fifth century.

As a result of these difficulties, a consensus of sorts has emerged among the most recent analyses of Dracontius' fateful work. It has been suggested that the lost poem was nothing more than a straightforward panegyric, intended to celebrate a foreign ruler, and which was affected only in the most abstract sense by political and religious considerations. Opinion is still divided as to whether the recipient was Zeno, in recognition of his imperial position, or Odovacer, in order to honour both his military successes and his relative religious tolerance.²⁴ Ingenious as these solutions are, however, the argument does not really explain precisely why the poet sought to celebrate a foreign ruler in this way, particularly given the likelihood that he enjoyed a social position of some importance at the time of the composition.

These considerations form the most significant objections to established assumptions regarding the lost work of the poet. That the formalized praise of a political figure provided an essential medium for the display of power in late Antiquity can hardly be disputed, particularly in the light of recent scholarship on the subject.²⁵ Of scarcely less importance, however, is the extent to which the writers of such pieces themselves stood to gain through the promulgation of their works, particularly given the necessarily performative nature of the genre itself. The political poem represented an intensely personal manifestation of the poet-client relationship, in which the latter stood to benefit from the ritualized praise of the work in question, and the former from the support of his recipient. This may seem to be an unnecessarily reductive approach to the study of a complex field of literary activity, but personal aspects are evident in all of the political poetry to have survived from the period. Dracontius' praise of Gunthamund within the *Satisfactio* and *De Laudibus Dei*, in which the poet hoped ultimately to secure his release, provide only one of the most obvious manifestations of this trend. To these might be added as a representative selection, Claudian's celebration of Stilicho, Venantius Fortunatus' poetry in honour of a succession of Merovingian kings and, from Vandal Africa itself, Florentinus' glorification of Thrasamund in the *Latin Anthology*.²⁶ However strongly the precise context of these individual poems has

²³ Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, p. 82.

²⁴ Compare Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, p. 77 and Bright, *The Minature Epic*, p. 16.

²⁵ On the role of the panegyric in late Antiquity, cf. esp. the excellent studies of S. MacCormack, 'Latin Prose Panegyrics', in T. Dorey, (ed.), *Empire and Aftermath* (London), pp. 143–205; M. Reydellet, *La Royauté dans la Littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Seville* (Rome, 1981); and the collected studies in M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1998).

²⁶ Claudian, *Carmina Minora*, 30; Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.*, VI.1, 2, 3, IX.1; 10.8; AL R.376 (S.371).

been disputed in recent years, the fundamental motive for composition remains clear in each case. Every writer, whether Egyptian, African or exiled Ravennate, composed his work with the aim of fostering, or further developing, personal relations with the subject of his verse. None sought to celebrate a ruler from whom he could not benefit immediately, and none directed his work to a figure indifferent to his praise.²⁷

Existing studies of Dracontius' lost work thus place the poet in an anomalous position. Not only did the writer stand to gain no immediate personal advantage from a work intended to celebrate a foreign ruler, the ruler himself can scarcely be thought to have profited from such a composition. The problem becomes still more acute given that Dracontius very probably enjoyed considerable social standing in Africa in the period prior to his incarceration. Again, frustratingly little can be stated for certain regarding Dracontius' precise social position, but the designation of the writer as *vir clarissimus et togatus* in the *subscriptio* to the fifth poem of his *Romulea*, and allusions to his judicial capacity in both *De Laudibus Dei* and *Romulea* V, suggest that the poet had a secure standing in contemporary society.²⁸ Dracontius, then, had nothing to gain, and a great deal to lose, from a disinterested celebration of an indifferent foreign ruler. More generally, the assumption that his unknown patron was necessarily a foreigner seems at odds with familiar patterns of late antique poetic patronage.

As a result, existing assumptions regarding Dracontius' lost work are difficult to sustain without considerable caution. For chronological reasons, two of the most convincing candidates for Dracontius' patronage must be rejected. For practical reasons, the most superficially compelling motive for the poet's composition – a political appeal to the empire or Italy – must also be discarded. Furthermore, the content of his surviving work, the nature of Dracontius' punishment, and patterns of poetic service in the late antique period, all call into question the assumption that the poet merely composed an innocent panegyric without due consideration of the likely outcome of his actions. A compelling alternative candidate does exist as the recipient of Dracontius' lost work, however, and one whose identity explains both the motivation for the poet's lost composition and the content of the pieces that do survive. Dracontius, it will be suggested here, may have constructed his *carmen ignotum* not for a foreign ruler, but for Gunthamund's predecessor as ruler of the African kingdom. Rather than Zeno or Anastasius, Odovacer or Theoderic, the poet's shadowy patron may tentatively be identified as the notorious Vandal King Huneric.

²⁷ On the importance of the poet-client relationship, compare Judith George, 'Venantius Fortunatus: Panegyric in Merovingian Gaul', in Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power*, pp. 225–6; A. Cameron, *Claudian. Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 42–62.

²⁸ Bustamante, *Dracontio y sus carmina profana*, pp. 42–51; Moussy, 'Introduction', pp. 7–18; Bright, *The Minature Epic*, pp. 187–91 and see the discussion of Dracontius' legalistic language in Chapter 5 by Gregory Hays in the present volume.

DRACONTIUS' VANDAL PATRON?

Huneric's identity as a plausible patron for Dracontius' *carmen ignotum* has never been seriously entertained in the past for a number of significant reasons. Foremost among these is, of course, Dracontius' famous reference to *dominum mihi ... ignotum* – an issue that will be considered in more depth below. The viability of a Vandal patron has been further clouded, however, by a number of connected, and at times circular, assumptions. Despite the universal acknowledgement that Victor of Vita's *Historia Persecutionis* hardly offers an impartial view of the reign of Huneric (indeed, a more vitriolic account would be difficult to imagine), modern perspectives on the king, and more generally of the earlier Vandal occupation, are perpetually infused by the image projected by the historian.²⁹ Simultaneously, Dracontius' forceful assertion of his own orthodoxy within his prison poetry and the common assumption that he sought a patron outside North Africa have created an almost indelible image of a pious poet implacably opposed to the persecuting regime. Few have considered that the author of *De Laudibus Dei* and one of the most notorious of heretical kings could have enjoyed a patron–client relationship, or that Dracontius' imprisonment could have resulted from such contact.

That Catholic Latin writers of late Antiquity frequently found sympathetic patrons among Arian kings can hardly be disputed. Cassiodorus, after all, devoted much of his career to the celebration of the heretical Goths, and comparable cases may be identified even without crossing the Mediterranean. The *Latin Anthology*, indeed, contains spectacular examples of poetic *Romanitas* in the service of the Arian kingdom. As is discussed elsewhere in this volume, the verses of the *Anthology* have frequently been associated with a literary and intellectual renaissance in the late fifth and early sixth century, but it would be a mistake to assume that celebration of the Vandal aristocracy was unknown before this period. Dracontius' lost panegyric to Thrasamund was merely the last of several that he composed in honour of the Hasding house. Both the *Satisfactio* and *De Laudibus Dei* include panegyric sections in honour of Gunthamund, and a short verse of Cato in honour of Huneric also survives in the *Anthology*.³⁰

There is nothing inherently implausible, therefore, in Dracontius' decision to write in praise of the Arian Huneric. Moreover, two passages within Victor of Vita's polemical *Historia* may help to cast light upon Dracontius' position at the time of his fateful composition. For the greater part of his work, Victor is content to paint the reign of Huneric in the starkest colours, and to portray the relations

²⁹ Despite the warning of Courtois, *Victor de Vita*, pp. 64–87, and H.-I. Marrou, 'Le valeur historique de Victor de Vita', *Les Cahiers de Tunisie*, 15 (1967), pp. 205–8, the historian has cast a long shadow over accounts of the Vandals. For some discussion of these trends, see C. Bourgeois, 'Les Vandales, le vandalisme et l'Afrique', *Ant. af.*, 16 (1980), pp. 220–222.

³⁰ AL R.387 (S.382). On this poem, and on Vandal patronage in general, see the stimulating survey of M. Chalon, G. Devallet, P. Force, M. Griffe, J.-M. Lassere and J.-N. Michaud, 'Memorable factum: Une célébration de l'évergétisme des rois Vandales dans l'Anthologie Latine', *Ant. af.*, 21 (1985), pp. 207–62.

between the king and his Catholic subjects as fundamentally hostile. In the middle of his third book, however, the historian turns his caustic pen upon those Africans who had come to terms with the persecuting king:

Those of you who love barbarians and sometimes praise them, in a way worthy of condemnation, give thought to their name and understand their ways ... However many be the gifts with which you befriend them, and however many the acts of compliance with which you placate them, they can think of nothing other than looking on Romans with envy, and, to the extent that things turn out in accordance with their will, it is their constant desire to darken the brightness and nobility of the Roman name.³¹

This passage has been interpreted as an attack upon the idealized image of barbarians propounded in works like Salvian's *De gubernatione Dei*, but might equally be seen as a condemnation of contemporaries who sought to adapt to the rule of the Arian kings.³² Victor's recognition of the existence of such individuals is amply demonstrated by his allusion elsewhere to Roman courtiers adopting the dress and manners of their barbarian masters.³³

Victor may thus have included among those who praise barbarians – 'in a way worthy of condemnation' – writers who honoured Huneric through the traditional medium of the panegyric. It cannot be assumed that the paucity of extant compositions from the reign of Huneric necessarily implies that literary activity within the period was completely moribund. Cato's praise of Huneric's *cocleae* within the *Latin Anthology* provides an important reminder that many of the most popular themes of early sixth-century African poetry were already familiar in the mid-fifth.³⁴ Thanks to Florentinus' extravagant verse, and Procopius' heavy-handed moralizing, the Germanic adoption of Romano-African bathing habits and the reconstruction of bath-houses are more frequently associated with the end of the Vandal period than with the persecuting austerity of the fifth century. Yet Cato's short poem in praise of Huneric's ingenious water-drill, and Victor's allusion to the same ruler's love of bathing remind us that Thrasamund and his successors were not the only Vandal kings to appreciate the sophisticated side of *Romanitas*.³⁵

As Pierre Riché has convincingly argued, Latin education remained sufficiently vibrant within fifth-century Africa to conclude that the period witnessed a sustained continuity of learning and literary activity, rather than a significant lapse followed

³¹ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.62: *Nonnulli qui barbaros diligitis et eos in condemnationem vestram aliquando laudatis, discutite nomen et intellegite mores ... Quos quantiscumque muneribus foveris, quantiscumque delinieris obsequiis, illi aliud nesciunt nisi invidere Romanis: et quantum ad eorum adtinet voluntatem, semper cupiunt splendorem et genus Romani nominis nebulare.*

³² John Moorhead, *Victor of Vita: History of the Vandal Persecution*. Translated Texts for Historians, 10 (Liverpool, 1992), p. 89, n. 31 suggests that Victor may have had Salvian in mind here, (assuming he knew the writer's work).

³³ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.8.

³⁴ AL R.387 (S.382). On the *cocleae*, cf. Vitr., *De Arch.*, X.6.

³⁵ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.16. On the importance of the bathing theme in Vandal-era poetry, see esp. Chalon et al, '*Memorable factum*', and Chapter 6 by Judith George in this volume.

by a late Vandal revival.³⁶ Dracontius' own early compositions were certainly the product of Huneric's reign, and would seem to betray a *modus vivendi* of sorts between Roman and Vandal *litterati*, and perhaps an active interest in the schools on the part of the ruling house.³⁷ In the first poem of his *Romulea*, for example, which was very probably an early product of the writer's pen, Dracontius honours his own rhetorical tutor Felicianus as a literary mentor for Vandal and Roman alike.³⁸ It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that there was an active literary milieu for Huneric to patronize, had he so wished, and that Dracontius would have been ideally placed to exploit such support.

Victor's *Historia* also suggests the considerable value that a celebration of Huneric might have had for the king, particularly late in his reign. The latter part of Huneric's rule was one of sustained political crisis, in which a formal declaration of Romano-African support for the royal house would have been of considerable value. Indeed, never would a formal display of support have been more useful than during Huneric's attempts to redefine the principles of royal succession:

This man, who had until then shown himself mild to everyone, wished to assign the kingdom to his sons after his death; as it happened this did not come to pass. He began to persecute in a cruel fashion his brother Theoderic and the children of this man, and equally the children of his brother Genton. Not one of these would he let go, unless death carried out what he desired.³⁹

The pattern of Vandal succession, in which rule passed to the eldest male member of the family, rather than through primogeniture, appears to have been instigated under Geiseric in order to legitimize his own questionable accession.⁴⁰ Huneric's attempt to overturn this pattern in favour of his own son Hilderic naturally necessitated some difficult diplomatic manoeuvring, as well as an extensive programme of familial murder. Victor describes at some length Huneric's repeated approaches to the Church in order to gain support for this initiative, and the mixed reactions of the Catholic establishment.⁴¹ Within such a context, the likely appeal of a formalized gesture of Roman support for the king, and also perhaps for his designated heir, seems clear enough. If Huneric was willing to turn to a hostile

³⁶ Riché, *Education and Culture*, pp. 37-9 and 55-6. A standpoint rejected by Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, p. 71, largely, it would seem, because of the very absence of extant compositions from the period.

³⁷ For this suggestion, cf. the thought-provoking study of A. Prisco, 'Note a Draconzio, Romul. I, 12-14', *Vichiana*, n.s. 3, (1974), pp. 175-8.

³⁸ Dracontius, *Rom.*, 1.12-16.

³⁹ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.12: *Ipse autem, qui sese iam dudum omnibus lenem ostenderat, desiderans post obitum suum filiis, quod non contigit, renum statuere, Theodoricum fratrem filiosque eius Gentunisque fratris nihilominus filios crudeliter coepit insequi. Quorum nullum dimitteret, nisi ei mors desiderii sui voluntatem auferret.*

⁴⁰ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 238-42; H. Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, tr. T. Dunlap (Berkeley, CA, 1990), pp. 164-5. See Procopius, *BV.*, I.7.29-30, 9.10; Jordanes, *Getica*, XXXIII.169.

⁴¹ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.19; for discussion, see Wolfram, *Germanic Peoples*, p. 174.

Church to legitimize his constitutional reform, his possible exploitation of literary figures seems entirely natural, regardless of his personal attitudes to the rarefied Latin learning of Carthage.

Huneric's support for the succession of his son was scarcely unusual by the standards of the successor kingdoms, but would certainly have had a profound impact upon contemporary politics, particularly when his nephew Gunthamund – one of the few Hasdings to escape the attentions of the king – succeeded in 484. If it is accepted that Dracontius may have composed a panegyric in honour of Huneric, then both his punishment and the content of his later verse may readily be explained. Gunthamund incarcerated the poet as a supporter of the previous, discredited regime, in much the same way as Huneric himself seems to have rejected his father's entourage.⁴² Dracontius' possible position as a spokesman of sorts for Huneric on behalf of the Roman community of Africa would have ensured that his removal from public life was more pressing than in the case of many other governmental figures. As a victim of political circumstance, therefore, rather than of his own treacherous behaviour, the relative leniency of Dracontius' punishment, and his refusal to accept a heavy burden of criminal guilt, both seem comprehensible.

If Dracontius had actively supported an Arian king, perhaps during the very period in which Huneric persecuted his co-religionists, then the more intense religious contrition of the poet's longer pieces may also be explained. Indeed, his detailed refutation of Arian theology within the *De Laudibus Dei* may be seen, not as a direct affront to the ruling Vandal monarch, but as a further repudiation of his own, previous loyalties to a king increasingly defined by his religious intransigence. This is not to suggest that Dracontius was ever Arian in sympathies, merely that his political expediency encouraged him to overlook theological matters in finding a royal patron. To a certain extent, existing scholarship has already implicitly adopted this position, in view of the Arian or Monophysite sympathies of the foreign rulers who have previously been put forward as possible patrons.⁴³ If Dracontius' lost poem was intended for Huneric, his motives in neglecting his own faith, however misguided, are at least readily apparent, as is the religious guilt that he subsequently expresses.

Such considerations are incidental, however, until Dracontius' allusions to his fateful poem are considered. Three short passages within the *Satisfactio* seem to betray the intentions of the poet, and would superficially seem to indicate that the verses were intended for a foreign patron. All, however, deserve extensive reconsideration.

The most important of the passages is certainly the most famous:

Mine was the blunder, being silent about forbearing lords, to celebrate one, though sovereign, unknown to me; such a fault as attends those ungrateful men who although

⁴² Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.15; Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 255 discusses such purges.

⁴³ On Dracontius' likely avoidance of religious themes within the lost poem see Moussy, 'Introduction', pp. 21–3.

they know their Lord, with unholy hearts worship vain idols. Just so, remissness fettered the Israelites when, forgetful of God, and lamenting, they worshipped the calf.⁴⁴

The significance of the section turns on the interpretation of the term *ignotum*. For reasons that scarcely need explaining, the standard reading of the text has followed from the most straightforward reading of the adjective. *Ignotum*, meaning ‘unknown’, must, it has been thought, imply that the *dominus ignotus* was a foreign lord – a ruler, as Dracontius stresses, but a ruler of a kingdom far removed from Vandal Africa. The subject is *ignotus*, it is assumed, because of his removal in space from the poet.

Yet the same term may imply temporal, rather than spatial remoteness, and in such a context, could readily be applied by Dracontius to Huneric: the deceased and disgraced Vandal king. It is in this sense that Lucan, one of Dracontius’ favoured exemplars, uses the term in the fourth book of the *Bellum Civile*:⁴⁵

No famous vintage, bottled in the year of a long-forgotten [*ignoto*] consul, restores these [Afranius’ defeated soldiers] to health; they drink not out of gold or agate, but gain new life from pure water.⁴⁶

Here *ignotum* may be translated, as it is in J. D. Duff’s Loeb edition, not as ‘foreign’, but rather as ‘long-forgotten’: an accentuation of temporal separation. On this occasion, Dracontius clearly did not intend his language to be a direct literary allusion to the *Bellum Civile*, but the parallel is important, nevertheless. Like Lucan’s consul, Dracontius’ patron is associated with the distant past. Through his careful linguistic use, Dracontius not only expresses a literal truth – that his patron is dead – but a symbolic declaration of his own distance, and that of the Vandal kingdom, from the lost recipient of his verses.

Although the former interpretation of *ignotum* would certainly imply that the poet’s *dominus* was a foreign one, it should be remembered that Dracontius evidently composed his *Satisfactio* for an audience who were well aware of the identity of the poet’s original patron. As others have noted, Dracontius’ reticence on the identity of his recipient, and his reference to the figure in the most allusive of terms, very probably arose from the poet’s reluctance to inflame the ire of his new master.⁴⁷ Within such a context, the use of *ignotum* offered an elegant demonstration of Dracontius’ rejection of his earlier patron, and his deference to the new Vandal king.

⁴⁴ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 93–98: *Culpa mihi fureat dominos reticere modestos|ignotumque mihi scribere vel dominum,|qualis et ingratos sequitur qui mente profana,|cum dominum norunt, idola vana colunt.|Israhelitarum populum sic culpa tenebat,|quando deum oblitus flens vitulum coluit.*

⁴⁵ On Dracontius’ use of Lucan, cf. Moussy, ‘Introduction’, p. 60. On the wider popularity of Lucan within Vandal North Africa, see the discussion by Hays in the present volume.

⁴⁶ Luc., IV.378–81: *Non erigit aegros|Nobilis ignoto diffusis consule Bacchus,|Non auro murraque bibunt, sed gurgite puro|Vita redit.*

⁴⁷ An important point made by Moussy, ‘Introduction’, p. 19: for diplomatic reasons, Dracontius was reticent about the identity of his lost patron.

The suggestion that Huneric, rather than a foreign ruler, might have been the recipient of Dracontius' lost poem also explains the poet's use of the term *dominus* – a loaded title that has puzzled a number of modern scholars.⁴⁸ The term appears to have been a politically important one in Vandal Africa after the Hasdings adopted the imperial titulature during the latter part of the fifth century, and guarded this prerogative jealously as an assertion of their ideological independence from both Rome and Constantinople. Although considerable attention has been paid to Gunthamund's adoption of the title on coins issued in his name, *Dominus* first appears in literature with respect to the Vandal kings during the reign of Huneric.⁴⁹ Dracontius would, of course, have been entirely justified in alluding to the emperor in such terms, but the same can scarcely be said of either Odovacer or Theoderic, neither of whom appropriated the title.

Given the fundamental purpose of the *Satisfactio*, the use of *dominus* in allusion to either of the Italian rulers would clearly have been counter-productive and would have offered a severe affront to the king whom Dracontius was attempting to appease.⁵⁰ Gunthamund could hardly have looked kindly upon a foreign king being exalted in such terms, and it is difficult to assume that the poet employed the term carelessly. Had Huneric been the original recipient of his poem, however, such considerations are largely immaterial. The persecuting king was, like his successor, a *dominus*, albeit a self-proclaimed one, and Gunthamund could scarcely deny him this rightful title.

The recognition that the audience of the *Satisfactio* would have been fully aware of the identity of Dracontius' patron is still more important when two further sections of the poem are considered. Again, had the poet intended his piece to be read by an audience ignorant of its broader context, it seems likely that the language employed would have been rather different. As it is, however, both passages may be read as elegant declarations of the poet's own regret at having written on behalf of Huneric, however peculiar his mode of expression may at first seem.

The first passage appears in the opening section of the *Satisfactio*, as a declaration of the poet's folly:

In this same way, because I am a culprit, sinning times without number, God drives my thoughts to forbidden things. Therefore, I, who could relate the deeds of my own kings, wars bearing triumph for the Hasding name, and by this tale could attain to the great boon of security as well as glory, by the bounty of the King – paid no regard to rewards (for so many indulgent rulers were passed over in silence), and – poor man! – quite suddenly sought certain dangers. Who, but one driven by madness by God's anger would strive for everything unpleasant; who else refuses everything that would prosper him?⁵¹

⁴⁸ For discussion, see Bright, 'Chronology', p. 195.

⁴⁹ On Gunthamund's coinage, compare Clover, 'Symbiosis', p. 63; Bright, 'Chronology', p. 195. On other appearances of *dominus* see Bustamante, *Dracontio y sus carmina profana*, p. 72; Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 243, n. 5.

⁵⁰ A point made by Bright, 'Chronology', p. 195.

⁵¹ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 19–28: *Sic mea corda Deus, nostro peccante reatu|temporis immodici, pellit ad illicita,|ut qui facta ducum possem narrare meorum,|unde mihi merces*

The significance of the passage is more apparent when considered alongside a reiteration of the same themes, some 21 lines later:

... God Himself, governs my lord [*dominus* – and here Dracontius quite obviously uses the term to refer to the Vandal king] and He will order him to be mindful of me, and, just man that he is, restore me and save me to tell the glorious exploits of his grandfather, his father's and his own, and among his children's children sing prayers for the royal house.⁵²

Again, the most straightforward reading of these lines perhaps supports the established line of argument. Now fully conscious of his misguided celebration of a foreign ruler, Dracontius would seem to declare that his talents could now be put, for the first time, to the celebration of Gunthamund and the Hasding line.

Dracontius' celebration of the Hasding house, however, contrasts quite sharply with what is known of the succession pattern from other sources, and seems particularly important in the light of Huneric's political activities. As has been noted, Huneric sought to overturn the succession system proposed by Geiseric and later described by both Jordanes and Procopius, and to replace it with a more straightforward system of primogeniture. As an inhabitant of Africa, and one sufficiently familiar with its ruling family to dedicate at least three pieces to Vandal kings over the course of his life, Dracontius would surely have been aware of these issues, and yet makes no reference to them within his writing.

Instead, the *Satisfactio* presents an edited version of the Hasding genealogy, alluding first to Godagisel and then to Geiseric, before offering praise to Gunthamund and his likely progeny. Its image of the Hasding monarchy, in other words, is complete but for Geiseric's half-brother, Gunderic, who ruled in Spain from 406–28, and the striking absence of the recently departed Huneric. In essence, the poet presents an edited Vandal king-list, in which discredited rulers are expunged in order to accentuate the glories of the remaining figures. This parade of rulers is then implicitly contrasted with the perceived failings of Dracontius' chosen patron. If this figure was Huneric, rather than a foreign ruler, then the poet's subtle deletion of the former king from the Vandal genealogy would have served a double purpose. At once, Dracontius would have demonstrated his loyalty to Gunthamund's revived line and demonstrated Huneric's alienation from it. Simultaneously, therefore, the writer could declare his new affiliations and distance himself from the old, in dramatic and appropriate style.

Crucially, these passages also demonstrate the extent to which Dracontius' verse was motivated by practical considerations. His reference to the glory and bounty that celebration of the Hasdings would accrue seriously challenges the established

*posset cum laude salutis|munere regnantis magna uenire simul,|praemia despicerem tacitis
tot regibus almis,|ut peterem subito certa pericla miser. |Quis nisi caelesti demens compulsus
ab ira|aspera cuncta petat, prospera cuncta negat?*

⁵² Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 49–52: ... *ipso meo domino Deus imperat atque iubebit|ut me
restituatur respiciaturque pius,|servet, aui ut laudes dicam patriasque suasque|perque suas
proles regia vota canam.*

image of the poet as a disinterested intellectual. Although an uncritical reading of the passage might again be interpreted as a belated acknowledgement of such themes on the part of the poet, his careful separation of Huneric from the 'true' Hasding line reveals that this need not be the case. The 'certain dangers' – *pericla certa* – to which Dracontius refers perhaps allude to the obvious hazards of supporting the aged and unpredictable Huneric in his attempted redefinition of the Vandal succession at the expense of most of his family. Best remembered in Gunthamund's reign for his persecution of Christians and family alike, Huneric would surely have seemed an unfortunate choice of patron to the repentant Dracontius. Such an interpretation would certainly account for Dracontius' choice of language, and is more readily explicable in human terms than the suggestion that he looked overseas for a recipient for his verses.

The contrast between the violence of Huneric's reign and the new regime may also be detected in several of the more orthodox, if brief, panegyric sections within the *Satisfactio*, intended to flatter Gunthamund:

For you are one who threatens slight punishments for the crimes of personal enemies, and feasts your captives with dainties – that it may be that Christ punish them, you spare your enemies; with him for avenger you rule, with Him watching you flourish.⁵³

And again, some lines later:

Under your rule, none will die a bloody death; whome'er but wills to be your friend knows that he will live.⁵⁴

The immediate motive behind these short sections was, of course, probably one of self-preservation. Dracontius understandably hoped that he, himself would not die a bloody death at the hands of his captor. Nevertheless, the implicit contrast between the recipient of the *Satisfactio* and the patron of the *carmen ignotum* is readily apparent, and has been extensively commented upon in the past.⁵⁵ Huneric, his hands dripping with the blood of Dracontius' co-religionists and Gunthamund's family, surely makes a more persuasive counterpoint to the ruling king than do any of the foreign rulers proposed by existing scholarship. Although Odovacer, Theoderic, Zeno and Anastasius were scarcely benign, none would have been regarded with such distrust as the recently-deceased Vandal King, particularly by a ruler who had himself only narrowly escaped death.

Further comparisons between Gunthamund and his predecessor are implicit in the couplet that precedes Dracontius' praise of his new king's clemency. Once

⁵³ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 121–4: *Nam qui inimicorum culpis ueniale minaris, | captiuosque tuos deliciis epulas, | puniat ut sit quod Christus, tu parcis iniquis; | vindice quo regnas, quo vigilante viges.*

⁵⁴ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 131–2: *Nemo cadet sub iure tuo sub morte cruenta, | scit se victurum qui volet esse tuus.*

⁵⁵ See for example, Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, pp. 55–6.

more, the poet proves himself to be adept at manipulating a widely-held image of Huneric in order to honour his successor:

You preserve lives; more than this, you yourself furnish sustenance that life may not be burdensome because of filching hunger.⁵⁶

The reference to the traumatic events that marked the close of Huneric's reign is obvious. The narrative of Victor's *Historia* closes with a substantial description of the famine that overwhelmed Africa during 484; its author was probably not alone in ascribing this to divine displeasure at the persecutions of the ruler.⁵⁷ The famine of 484 would doubtless have been fresh in the minds of the audience of Dracontius' *Satisfactio*, with the result that the rather happier experiences of Gunthamund's reign would have provided an appropriate context for praise.

A final contrast between the benevolent Gunthamund and Huneric is evident in the closing lines of the short panegyric section, immediately before Dracontius loses himself in extended metaphor:

An enemy free from care, with no thought of death, yields to his foes, for you, happily, preserve the subject peoples.⁵⁸

While Dracontius' personal difficulties may again be detected in his choice of subject matter, the most striking aspect of the section is the direct reference to the 'subject peoples' – *colla subacta* – of Gunthamund's rule. Once more, the impact of the poet's eulogy is only apparent when the historical context of his verse is taken into account. Unlike Dracontius' lost patron, the poet implies, Gunthamund is tolerant of his subjects – a contrast that seems particularly relevant if the *colla subacta* in question were the same for each ruler. Like the short sections discussed above, the language of Dracontius' praise strongly suggests that the poet intended a direct comparison to be drawn between Gunthamund and Huneric. While the celebration of the new Vandal king could still be relevant if the poet's patron was a foreign ruler, the peculiar emphases of the panegyric section of the *Satisfactio* strongly support his identification with Gunthamund's vilified predecessor.

The recognition that Dracontius may have composed a poem in honour of Huneric has a number of important implications. In many ways, the proposal supports existing views on the likely relationship between Romano-Africans and their barbarian neighbours in the middle-Vandal period, but which are poorly

⁵⁶ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 129–30: *Conservas animas, victum super ipse ministras,|ne sit vita gravis subripiente fame.*

⁵⁷ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.59–60; and see Clover, 'Carthage and the Vandals', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.) *Excavations at Carthage VII* (Anna Andor, MI, 1982), p. 15 on possible archaeological corroboration of Victor's narrative.

⁵⁸ Dracontius, *Satisf.*, 135–6: *Securus sine morte manus dat hostibus hostis,|nam bene conseruas colla subacta iugo.*

served by the fragmentary literary evidence. Dracontius' composition, if it was intended for Huneric rather than a foreign ruler, would provide a dramatic illustration of the continuity in literary patronage within fifth-century Africa, in which continued scholarly activity was complemented by productions on behalf of the ruling house.⁵⁹ Dracontius' early compositions highlight the vibrancy of literary activity during the period, and the likelihood emerges that royal interest in the arts substantially predated the 'renaissance' of Thrasamund's reign.⁶⁰ The middle-Vandal period may thus increasingly be seen as one of sustained interest in Latin learning, rather than a largely moribund period ended only by the succession of the cultured Thrasamund.

The vilified King Huneric also emerges from this study in a rather more favourable light than that cast by the *Historia* of Victor Vitensis. There can be little doubt that the king appreciated the trappings of Roman rule, and in some senses at least sought to emulate existing governmental forms.⁶¹ His adoption of the term *dominus* and his exploitation of Romans at court have already been commented upon, but to these policies might be added a number of other initiatives. Huneric's instigation of the anti-Catholic law in 484, for example, directly encroached upon the imperial right of *promulgatio legis*.⁶² Of less immediate importance was the king's decision to rename the Mediterranean settlement of *Hadrumetum* as *Unuricopolis* in his own honour, but this too represented an appropriation of the imperial prerogative.⁶³ Such a ruler would doubtless have fully appreciated the potential of the Latin panegyric, given an opportunity to do so, and it may have been just such a celebration to which Victor alludes in his *Historia*. The tentative identification of the author of the work perhaps helps this rehabilitation. An image emerges of Huneric, not as a bloodthirsty despot, interested only in the destruction of religious enemies and his family, but as a more recognizable early medieval king.

Perhaps inevitably, the image of Dracontius himself also changes dramatically if the purpose of his lost work is re-examined. The poet has traditionally been cast as a wronged figure, languishing in prison for a crime of conscience, or for the promulgation of a harmless piece of political rhetoric. The new suggestion places him more firmly in the company of other great Latin poets of late Antiquity. Dracontius emerges as a figure who responded to changing circumstances, and

⁵⁹ On this compare Bustamante, *Draconcio y sus carmina profana*, pp. 37–8 and Riché, *Education and Culture*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ Prisco, 'Note a Draconzio', pp. 177–8 for the suggestion that Huneric's reign laid the foundations for the later 'renaissance'.

⁶¹ On the Vandal adoption of Imperial paraphernalia, cf. esp. M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity. Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 261–6.

⁶² Wolfram, *Germanic Peoples*, p. 174.

⁶³ Compare L. Musset, 'Les villes baptisées du nom d'un souverain au haut moyen âge (Ve – Xe siècles)', *Revue Moyen Âge Latin*, 25–34 (1978), pp. 27–38; McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, p. 262. The extent to which this was regarded as an encroachment upon Imperial rights is amply illustrated by Justinian's subsequent renaming of the same settlement *Iustinianê*. cf. Procopius, *Aed.*, VI.6.6.

adapted his craft to a shifting political landscape. Like Claudian and Fortunatus, the poet subordinates his muse to the interests of various patrons in different environments. That Dracontius was capable of such expediency can hardly be doubted; he does, after all, appear to have celebrated Thrasamund in just such a verse panegyric later in his career, and to have tailored his prison poems to the likely tastes of Gunthamund, his captor. What is suggested here is that the poet, quite understandably, began this process early in his career. As a result, he appears less as a disinterested and naïve man of letters, and more as a poet who responded to the changing world around him and who sought to use his skill to smooth over his mistakes.

In a sense, such a conclusion can only intensify sympathy for the imprisoned poet, writing his impassioned verses from his gaol cell. He suffered, not for holding onto anachronistic ideas of imperial regeneration, or for his devout Catholicism, but for following the standard patterns of late antique patronage. Dracontius did not compose a pointless poem for an indifferent foreign lord, but found his ideal recipient rather closer to home, in the person of his barbarian overlord. The poet suffered for backing the wrong horse, and suffered greatly, but at least he picked one that seemed to be winning at the time.

Chapter 8

The So-called *Laterculus Regum Vandalorum et Alanorum*: A Sixth-century African Addition to Prosper Tiro's Chronicle?¹

Roland Steinacher

In 1898 Theodor Mommsen identified three manuscript fragments as the remains of a more detailed chronicle of the Vandal kingdom. Mommsen found these fragments in four codices: Par. Lat. 4860, which he defined as a copy of a so called *Augiensis*,² Matr. univ. 134 from Madrid, Codex No. 223 from Augsburg and Codex Osmensis, known only from descriptions. In his edition of the *Laterculus Regum Vandalorum et Alanorum*, which he distinguished from the chronicle of Prosper, Mommsen suggested that the text was composed as a separate chronicle. Holder-Egger had not recognized this independence in his own examination of Prosper's Chronicle, written shortly before Mommsen's edition. Scholarship since Mommsen has used only this edition in the *Chronica Minora* III and has valued the text chiefly for its supposed use of diplomas and hence the precision of its dating.

This chapter argues that the text of the *Laterculus* did not originate in diplomas, but belonged to an African version of Prosper's chronicle. I propose a new edition, which puts the text back in its original context. Rather than looking for 'good' and 'bad' texts according to nineteenth-century categories, I try to analyse the specific character of each manuscript under consideration.

¹ This essay derives from my thesis 'Der *Laterculus Regum Vandalorum et Alanorum*. Eine afrikanische Ergänzung der Chronik Prosper Tiros aus dem 6. Jahrhundert', (unpubl. Masters thesis, Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, 2001), supervised by Walter Pohl. I am greatly indebted to Owen M. Phelan from Notre Dame University who kindly read the text and helped with the English translation.

² For a detailed discussion of the codices cf. Steinacher, 'Der *Laterculus*', pp. 3–20. Compare *Augiensis*, Mommsen's idea of an original mid ninth-century Reichenau codex: 'Excursus I: The Reichenau Problem'; H. Mayr-Harting, *Ottonian Book Illumination. An Historical Study. I: Themes* (New York 1991), pp. 203–9; T. Mommsen, *Die Chronik des Cassiodorus Senator vom Jahre 519 n. Chr. nach den Handschriften herausgegeben*, Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften. 3 vols (Leipzig 1861), pp. 574–90.

The starting point for any such study must be the edition provided by Mommsen in the *Chronica Minora* III. Introducing his edition, Mommsen discusses the manuscripts he used for his work:

Laterculi regnum Wandalorum et Alanorum, quem edimus, accepimus recensiones duas. Plenior et melior ad nos propagavit. 1. Augiensis liber scriptus saec. VIII is, de quo egimus ad Prosperum vol. 1 p. 362 ipse deperditus, sed extant ex eo descripti: 2. Parisinus 4860 saec. X. ad hunc librum laterculus editus est inter opera Prosperi publicata Parisiis a. 1711 p. 756. 3. Augustanus saec. XV. ad hunc librum laterculum edidit Canisius a. 1601 in lectionem antiquarum vol. 1 p. 161. Brevior formam exhibent libri hi: 4. Matritensis univ. 134 saec. XIII. de quo ad Victorem vol. 2 p. 167 diximus. compilationi ei volumini insertae f. 42'–47, quam ad Prosperum vol. 1 p. 493 seq. enarravimus, attributae in codice Isidoro, vere formatae in Africa anno p. Chr. 523, adhaeret is de quo agitur laterculus. quae praecedunt Prosperiana adiectis Africanis quibusdam, item computus edita sunt vol. 1 p. 495–497; repetivimus inde hoc loco quae epitomator Africanus Prosperianis inseruit de suo. 5. Osmensis 'non valde vetus', de quo ad Hydatium vol. 2 p. 8 exposuimus, secundum Perezium laterculum eundem habuit 'ad finem chronici d. Isidori', scilicet chronicorum eorundem, quae praecedunt in Matritensi. archetypi deperditi exemplum Perezianum Segobrigense edidit Villanueva *viage* 3, 306 (cf. p. 203). computus quoque verba prima postremaque ita habet, ut ea vol. 1 p. 497 ex Matritensi rettulimus, nisi quod *tranuamundi* editur pro *trasamundi* et *ingresso* pro *ingressum*.³

The fifteenth-century Codex 223 in the Staats- and Stadtbibliothek Augsburg was not analysed, given that the versions of the chronicles of Eusebius/Jerome and Prosper were taken from Par. Lat. 4860, and the text is nearly identical in each. Consequently, the codex is chiefly of interest for the history of scholarship because Heinrich Canisius used it for his edition of Prosper.⁴ The codex Osmensis used by Villanueva in his 'Viage literario à las iglesias de España'⁵ is lost, although the transcriptions made at the time were used. For the following work, however, the codices from Paris and Madrid were most important.

THE NINTH-CENTURY VERSION OF PARIS, BN FONDS LAT. 4860

The text called *Laterculus Regum Wandalorum et Alanorum*⁶ by Mommsen is situated on a single page (fol. 49v). The text takes up about two thirds of this page. On fol. 49r the chronicle of Prosper in the version of *Prosper Augustanus* is written. Quire 6 ends with fol. 49bis immediately after the text of the Laterculus. The chronicle of Cassiodorus is written on the following quire. After the entry for King *Geilamer* there is some free space on the parchment. In this edition medieval

³ T. Mommsen (ed.), MGH, AA, XIII, *Chronica Minora*, III (Berlin, 1898), p. 456.

⁴ H. Canisius, *Antiquae lectiones*, tomus II (Ingolstadt 1602); R. Schmidt, *Reichenau und St. Gallen. Ihre literarische Überlieferung zur Zeit des Klosterhumanismus in St. Ulrich und Afra zu Augsburg um 1500*, Vorträge und Forschungen, vom Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für mittelalterliche Geschichte, 33 (Sigmaringen, 1985), pp. 140–47 discusses the codex.

⁵ J. Villanueva, *Viage literario à las iglesias de España* (Madrid, 1817), vol. 3, pp. 306ff.

⁶ Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, III, pp. 458–60.

contractions are phased out and emendations are surrounded by square brackets. The medieval spelling was not changed, the e-caudatae, for example, not corrected to *ae*. Names of places and persons are capitalized. The paragraphs of the edition follow the columns of the manuscript. The specific variations of Augsburg Codex 223 are mentioned in the footnotes and taken from Mommsen's edition. *UUandali* written in this way corresponds with the manuscript. *Vandali* is the usual Latin form, but the scribe wanted to pronounce it *Wandali*. *W* is not used before the eleventh century. The double *u* is the usual sound notation.⁷ Contemporary authentic records are rare, but an obvious example is the inscription on a silver bowl of King Gelimer: *Geilamir Rex Vandalorum et Alanorum*⁸.

The names of the consuls Theodosius and Festus, the bishop Eugenius, the martyr Agileus, the emperors Avitus and Valens are written in the form familiar from other sources. *Carthago* (as a noun and as an adjective) and the province of Africa correspond to other sources. But the bishop Bonifatius is written *Bonefacius*. The names of the Vandal kings are not consistent. One can find *Geisericus* and *Geisiricus*, *Hunerix* and *Henerici* (but two times the correct genitive *Hunerici*), *Guntamundus*, *Gento*, *Hiltirix* and *Geilamer*.

Edition I: The Reichenau Version from Par. Lat. 4860, Fol. 49v

Post consulatum Theodosii XVII et Festi: Geisericus UUandalorum rex Carthaginem ingressus est die XIII Kalendas Nouembris.⁹ Qui regnavit in eadem Africa civitate annis XXXVII mensibus III diebus VI.¹⁰

Post hunc regnavit Hunerix filius eius annis VII mensibus X dies XXVIII.¹¹ Qui in fine anni VII regni sui catholice ecclesie persecutionem fecit omnesque ecclesias clausit et cunctos domini catholicos sacerdotes cum Eugenio Carthaginensi episcopo exilio religavit. Qui Dei iudicio scatens vermibus vitam finivit.

Post eum regnavit Guntamundus, Gentunis eiusdem Hunerici fratris filius,¹² annos XI menses VIII diebus XI. Qui tertio anno regni sui cymeterium sancti martyris Agilei apud Carthaginem catholicis dare precepit,¹³ Eugenio Carthaginensis episcopo ab eodem iam de exilio revocato.

X autem anno regni sui ecclesias catholicorum aperuit et omnes Dei sacerdotes petente Eugenio Carthaginense¹⁴ episcopo de exilio revocavit. Quae ecclesiae

⁷ B. Bischoff, *Paläographie des römischen Altertums und des abendländischen Mittelalters*, Grundlagen der Germanistik (Berlin, 1986), p. 164.

⁸ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 380 and n. 111; H. Wolfram, 'Intitulatio I. Lateinische Königs- und Fürstentitel bis zum Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts', *MIÖG*, Suppl., 21(Cologne/Vienna, 1967), p. 80 and n. 22.

⁹ 19 October.

¹⁰ Augustanus 223: *eandem african ciuitatem*.

¹¹ Augustanus 223: *dies XVIII*.

¹² Augustanus 223: *filium*.

¹³ Augustanus 223: *praecipit*.

¹⁴ Augustanus 223: *carthaginensi*.

fuerunt clause annos X mensibus VI diebus V.¹⁵ Hoc est ab VIII anno Henerici, id est ex die VII Idus Februarii, usque in X annum regis Guntamundi in die III Idus Augusti in quo completi sunt supra dicti anni X menses VI dies V. Qui memoratus Guntamundus rex postmodum vixit annos II mensem I.

Post quem regnavit Trasamundus Gentunis filius annos XXVI menses VIII dies III. Ab exordio ergo imperii Aviti usque annum XXVI Trasamundi.....XVIII. A XIII autem anno imperii et morte Valentis usque in annum XXVI Trasamundi anni sunt CXVIII.

Post quem regnavit Hiltirix¹⁶ filius Hunerici annos VIII dies VIII.¹⁷ Qui in exordio regni sui Bonifacium episcopum apud Carthaginem in ecclesia sancti Agilei ordinari praecepit et omnibus catholicis libertate[m] restituit.

Quo regnante adsumpta tyranide Geilamer regnum eius invadit in quo fecit annos III menses III. Qui tanta homicidia scelestus commisit, ut nec parentibus parceret.

Fiunt ergo ab exordio regni Geisirici regis usque ad exitum UUandalorum anni XCIII menses X dies XI.

Ab interitu ergo Valentis quod erat¹⁸ in XIII anno regni eius usque ad supra dictum tempus sunt anni CLIII.

Collecta ergo omnium¹⁹ summa annorum ab Adam usque ad UUandalorum perditionem fiunt anni VdcccXXXIII.

THE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY MADRID VERSION OF A PROSPER EPITOME TAKEN FROM A CODEX OF THE BIBLIOTECA DE LA UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE, CODEX 134

In this codex the text is situated on fol. 47v and is separated at the beginning of the *computus* following Jerome (*Colliguntur a principio mundi . . .*) with a chapter sign from the epitome of Prosper's text. Immediately after *Gheilamir in fugam verso postea capto* the *Chronica maiora* of Isidore is written: *Seriem temporum per generationes* (. . .). The *S* is done as a Fleuronée and takes up five lines.

The text is not further structured. In the edition which follows, the text written immediately before the *Laterculus Regum Vandalorum et Alanorum* is also included. Passages from Prosper are italicized. The citations from Prosper are identified in the footnotes so that one can study the work of the medieval scribe producing an epitome.

Medieval spelling is not changed. *Affrica* is unusual, but used consistently by this scribe. The scribe is not familiar with the Vandal kings, Huneric is called

¹⁵ Augustanus 223: *annos XI*.

¹⁶ Augustanus 223: *hildrix*.

¹⁷ Emendation following Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 405ff.: *annos VII dies VIII*.

¹⁸ Augustanus 223: *quod erat* not written.

¹⁹ Augustanus 223: *omnis*.

Hugneribus, Hilderic once *Hildrix* and later *Hildericus*, Geiseric mostly *Geisericus*, but once in the epitome *Gersericus*. *UUandali* is consistently used in this Spanish codex as well.

Edition II: The Madrid Version from Matr. Univ. 134

*Valentinianus regno potitur Occidentis et decreto Theodosii Augustus appellatur.*²⁰ *Gens UUandalorum ab Ispania Affricam transit.*²¹ *Augustinus episcopus moritur VIIIo anno ante ingressum Carthaginis.*²² *Pax cum UUandalis facta data eis ad habitandum per Trigetium Ipponie regie.*²³ *Rex Geisericus intra habitationis suae limites volens catholicam fidem Arriana impietate subvertere quosdam nostrorum episcopos, eatenus persecutus est, ut eos privatos iure basilicarum suarum etiam civitatibus polleret.*²⁴ *Valentinianus filiam Theodosii in matrimonio accipit.*²⁵ *Per idem tempus IIII Hispaniae viri Archadius, Probus, Paschasius et Euticius in Arrianam sectam transire nolentes diversis mortibus interempti illustri martyrio mirabiliter occubuerunt. Puer autem Paulillus nomine frater Paschasii et Euticii pro catholica fide ad infimam servitutem dampnatus est.*²⁶ *Gersericus tribus annis Ypone regio exemptis Cartaginem occupat sub die XIII kalendas Novembris*²⁷ *omnesque opes eius excruciat diversis tormentorum genere civibus in suum ius vertit. Ecclesias expoliavit ut iam non divini cultus loca sed suorum esse in [habi]tacula iussit universum captivi populi ordinem saevus, sed praecipue nobilitati et religioni infensus ut non discerneretur, hominibus magis an Deo bellum intulisset.*²⁸ *Eo tempore archidiaconus urbis Rome Leo nomine gaudenti patria Romane ecclesie episcopus ordinatur.*²⁹ *Cum Geisericus autem Valentiniano Augusto pax confirmata certis spatiis Affrica inter utrumque divisa est.*³⁰

Colliguntur a principio mundi usque ad novissimum annum Trasamundi anni VDCCVIII hoc modo: ab Adam usque ad Abraham anni IIICLXXXIII a nativitate Abrahe usque ad vocationem anni LXXXV a prefato anno promission[is] Abrahe usque ad exitum Israhel de Egipto anni CCCC.XXX

²⁰ T. Mommsen (ed.), MGH, AA, IX, *Chronica Minora*, I (Berlin, 1892), 1289, p. 471.

²¹ See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, I, 1295, p. 472.

²² See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, I, 1304, p. 473: Aurelius Augustinus episcopus per omnia excellentissimus moritur V. kl. Sept., (...).

²³ See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, I, 1321, p. 474.

²⁴ See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, I, 1327, p. 475: The names of the most famous of these bishops Posidius, Severianus and Novatus were not mentioned by the compiler. Instead of *polleret* Mommsen used *pellieret*.

²⁵ See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, I, 1328, p. 475: Valentinianus Augustus ad Theodosium principem Constantinopolim profiscitur filiamque eius in matrimonium accipit.

²⁶ See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, I, 1329, p. 475.

²⁷ My emendation: sub die XIII kalendas Novembris.

²⁸ See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, I, 1339, p. 477: my emendation: *tacula* as written in the Matr. univ. 134 does not exist as a Latin word, *habitatula* as in Prosper is preferred.

²⁹ See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, I, 1341, p. 478.

³⁰ See Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, I, 1347, p. 479.

Moyses in heremo fuit anni XL
 Iosue in terra promissionis anni XXVII
 sub iudicibus anni sunt CCLXXXVIII
 sub Hely sacerdote anni XL
 in regno Saul anni XL
 a David usque ad transmigrationem Babilonis anni sunt CCCCLXXXV
 a transmigracione Babilonis usque ad nativitatem domini nostri Iesu Christi anni
 DLXXXVII dominus Iesus Christus hic in corpore positus annis XXXIII
 a passione domini usque ingressum UUandalorum Cartagine anni CCCCXIII.

Geisericus rege³¹ in Affrica annos XXVII menses II. Hugneribus filius eius rege³²
 Cartagine annos VII menses X. Guntamundus nepos ex filio Geisericici Gentune
 regnavit Cartagine annos XI menses VIII. Trasamundus frater Guntamundi regnavit
 apud Cartaginem annos XXVI menses IX ac sic agitur hodie LXXXIII anni ab
 ingressu Cartaginis. Deinde Hildrix Hucnerici filius, Geisericici atque nepos regnavit
 Cartagine annos VII diebus XIII. Gheilamir tirranide assumpta Hilderico regno
 pulso eiusque origine truncata dominatus est Afris anni III menses III. Ingressus est
 Belisarius magister militiae cum exercitu Orientis Cartaginem sub die [XVII]
 kalendas Octobris.³³ Gheilamir in fugam verso postea capto.

ATTEMPTING TO UNDERSTAND THE TEXT

First we have to consider whether the dates given in the texts edited above are really so unique as the scholarly tradition has assumed them to be. Vandal regnal dating provides the chronological framework for both versions. In the chronicle of Prosper which appears immediately before the *Laterculus* in Par. Lat. 4860, consular annals are used for dating. The chancelleries of Germanic *regna* used the Roman calendar for dating the day. The chancelleries of the Burgundian King Sigismund and the Gothic King Alaric II both used regnal years, which appeared between the day and the place of production.³⁴ The two diplomas of the Vandal King Huneric included within the *Historia* of Victor of Vita were also dated using the king's regnal years:

³¹ In the manuscript *rege* can be identified. This is part of a so called shortened *ablativus absolutus*. A single noun or participium can be a complete *ablativus absolutus*. See H.-J. Glücklich, R. Nickel and P. Petersen, *Interpretatio. Neue lateinische Textgrammatik* (Würzburg, 1980), p. 79.

³² The same shortened *ablativus absolutus*!

³³ Emendation of F. Papencordt, *Geschichte der vandalischen Herrschaft in Afrika* (Berlin, 1837), p. 152 and L. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen* (Dresden, 1901, repr. Munich, 1942), p. 139, n. 2. Instead of *sub die XVIII kalendas Octobris*.

³⁴ R. Heuberger, 'Vandalische Reichskanzlei und Königsurkunde im Vergleich mit verwandten Einrichtungen und Erscheinungen', *MIÖG*, Suppl., 11 (1929), p. 103ff.; H. Fichtenau, 'Politische' Datierungen des frühen Mittelalters', in his *Beiträge zur Mediävistik. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, 3 (Stuttgart 1986), p. 192ff.

have been closed for ten years, six months and five days. Eugenius is made bishop of Carthage in 480–81, after the diocese has been vacant for 24 years. He is given the first position in the *Notitia Provicarum* for Africa Proconsularis.⁵⁰

The entry on King Thrasamund (496–523) in the Reichenau version is particularly insubstantial. For the most part, two dates are used to fix the regnal years of the Vandal kings: the beginning of the reign of Emperor Avitus (455–56) and the fourteenth year of the reign of Valens (364–78) – namely the battle of Adrianople in 378. These two dates 455 and 378 are used as a basis for calculating to the 26th year of Thrasamund's reign. The second of these calculations is, in fact, in error and gives the year 496 – the first year of Thrasamund's rule. The scribe or the copyist would thus seem to have confused the first and the 26th years of the king's reign.

The Reichenau manuscript has a gap here. At the right end of the parchment the numeral XVIII is written with another, lighter pen. Courtois proposes that the numeral LXVIII had been initially written in the gap. Sixty-eight years, obviously, is the period between the beginning of Avitus' reign in 455 and the 27th year of Thrasamund's reign in 523.⁵¹ But Courtois overlooked the fact that the gap in the text is much bigger than the numeral L. Why did the mid ninth-century Reichenau scribe omit a part of the text? Only two thirds of fol. 49v are filled, so it was not lack of expensive parchment. Neither is there a hand change. The scribe copied from a longer version and only used the information which seemed valuable to him. He had started to create a new text, but did not finish his work.

The Madrid version states that only 84 years had passed between the capture of Carthage and Thrasamund's accession to the throne: *Trasamundus frater Guntamundi regnavit apud Cartaginem annos XXVI menses IX ac sic agitur hodie LXXXIII anni ab ingressu Cartaginis*. The Madrid version begins by speaking of *hodie* and of the *novissimus annus Trasamundi*. 5708 years passed from the creation of the world up to this event.

The above-mentioned years in the Reichenau version do not only refer to the emperors, but are also linked to the end of Jerome's chronicle in 378 and the first continuation of Prosper's chronicle in 455. The continuation of Prosper is written in Par. Lat. 4860 as in Augustanus No. 223.⁵²

Felix Papencordt believed there were two phases in the creation of the pattern of the Reichenau version. The first phase would be the 27th year of Thrasamund's reign, the second would have taken place after the fall of the Vandal Kingdom. His point was that from these two dates the original scribe calculated back to the end of Jerome's chronicle and the beginning of Prosper's.⁵³ The MGH editor Oswald Holder-Egger argued against Papencordt and suggested that the restitution of ecclesiastical rights by King Hilderic would have been a reason to start a new

⁵⁰ 'Eugenius 2', in *PCBE*, pp. 362–65; *Not. Prov.*, line 1.

⁵¹ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 406.

⁵² Holder-Egger, 'Untersuchungen über einige annalistische Quellen', p. 47.

⁵³ Papencordt, *Geschichte der vandalischen Herrschaft*, p. 358.

The Reichenau version's sum of 93 years, 10 months and 11 days still has a discrepancy of 16 days in its addition of the dates; a point which Courtois also explains. Counted from 19 October 439, 30 August 533 appears as the date for the end of the Vandal reign within the Reichenau text. This might be equated with the date of debarkation of Belisarius' troops on the African shore. Procopius writes in his history of the Vandal War that the Byzantine campaign lasted for 16 days.⁵⁷

The starting point for this argument is that Belisarius captured Carthage on 15 September. Papencordt made this suggestion, bearing in mind the date of St Cyprian's Day on 14 September.⁵⁸ Procopius notes that on St. Cyprian's Eve the Arian priests prepared the church of this saint in Carthage. Ammatas, the king's brother, marched against the Byzantines on the 13th. In the afternoon the battle against King Gelimer took place. Belisarius spent the night of 13 to 14 September at Decimum. The following day he arrived at Carthage and ordered the army to erect a camp there. On 15 September Belisarius captured Carthage.⁵⁹

The Madrid version identifies 14 September as the day Carthage was captured. *Ingressus est Belisarius magister militiae cum exercitu Orientis Cartaginem sub die XVIII kalendae Octobris*. Bearing in mind the dates of Procopius, this date should be changed to *XVII kalendae Octobris*.⁶⁰ Again the scribe was confused by the numerals. The Reichenau version does not name Belisarius at all.

With respect to other dates, the Reichenau version seems to be more exact and also provides the lengths of Vandal reigns in days. The Madrid version only numbers the months. However some dates vary significantly in the two versions. There is a difference of one month regarding Geiseric's reign (Reichenau: three months; Matr.: two), for Huneric the same discrepancy is seen, the length given for Gunthamund's reign also differs by a month (Reichenau: nine months; Matr. eight) and Thrasamund's reign is one month longer in the Madrid version than in the Reichenau version. Matr. univ. 134 allows seven years for King Hilderic, but the Reichenau text prefers eight. For Gelimer the dates are the same. The date of the end of Vandal rule is included only in the Madrid version.

The Madrid version seems to be taken from an addition to Prosper, which was twice revised, as has been discussed. The versions from Paris and Madrid derive from the same sixth-century African textual tradition. This does not imply a canonical or fixed text. A complete reconstruction of this primary text is not possible. Information about this text is not transmitted in any other sources. The African continuation of Prosper's chronicle (which was also treated as such by Mommsen) cannot be separated from the appendix discussed here. Moreover, the compilers of the ninth and tenth centuries did not use the text in isolation.

⁵⁷ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 406. In another chapter of his book he declares 30 August as a probable, but not certain, date (Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 353: 'date probable, mais non certaine'.)

⁵⁸ Papencordt, *Geschichte der vandalischen Herrschaft*, p. 152.

⁵⁹ Procopius, *BV.*, I.21.

⁶⁰ See also Schmidt, *Die Wandalen*, p. 139, n. 2.

Byzacena. Within it, Huneric's death is outlined in a way very similar to that included in the Reichenau text. *Qui tamen dei iudicio post non multos dies turpissima morte praeventus scatens vermibus exspiravit*.⁷² The *iudicium dei* derives from the theological systems of Cyprian of Carthage, Eusebius, Orosius and Augustine.⁷³ In the chronicle of Victor of Tunnuna, King Huneric dies in the same way as Arius the heretic when his bowels burst out of his body.⁷⁴ Isidore of Seville took up this version word for word.⁷⁵ Gregory of Tours used few sources for Vandal history as can be seen from his identification of a certain Guneric as the successor of King Thrasamund.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Gregory reports that Huneric was possessed by a demon and mangled himself: the motif of Huneric's strange death was known in sixth-century Gaul.⁷⁷

GUNTHAMUND AND THE ARIAN-CATHOLIC DÉTENTE

Huneric had two brothers, Theoderic and Genton. Genton was a son of Geiseric, mentioned by Procopius and Victor of Vita.⁷⁸ In an effort to secure the succession of his own sons, Huneric initiated a purge of his relatives. Theoderic's wife and her eldest son were executed, Theoderic and Genton's son Godagisel both died in exile.⁷⁹ Genton's sons Gunthamund and Thrasamund survived and subsequently succeeded to the throne. The Reichenau version reports that King Gunthamund restored the shrine of Agileus to the Catholics and that bishop Eugenius was allowed to return to Carthage during his reign; the only text to contain this information.⁸⁰ The reopening of the Catholic churches and the return of the exiled clergymen after an intervention of Eugenius are dated precisely. The churches had been closed for ten years, six months and five days: from 7 February (*VII Idus Februarii*) of the eighth year of Huneric's reign (484 AD) to 10 August (*III Idus Augusti*) of the tenth year of Gunthamund's reign (494 AD). The dates are even repeated again. This information shows that the scribe who produced the original text used also sources unknown to us.

⁷² *Passio septem monachorum*, C. Halm (ed.), MGH, AA, III (Berlin, 1879), c.59; cf. Courtois, *Victor de Vita*, p. 26f; Ebert, *Allgemeine Geschichte*, p. 436f.

⁷³ Schwarcz, 'Bedeutung und Textüberlieferung der Historia Persecutionis', p. 117.

⁷⁴ Vict. Tun., a.479: *Hic itaque Hugnericus inter innumerabiles suarum impietatum strages, quas in catholicos exercebat, octavo regni sui anno interioribus cunctis effusis ut Arius pater eius misere vitam finivit*. Greg. Tur., *LH.*, II.22 and Rufinus, *HE.*, III.13 also narrated the death of Arius.

⁷⁵ Isidore of Seville, *Historia*, T. Mommsen (ed.), MGH, AA, XI (Berlin, 1894), c.79

⁷⁶ Greg. Tur., *LH.*, II.2.

⁷⁷ Greg. Tur., *LH.*, II.3.

⁷⁸ Procopius, *BV.*, I.5, 6, 8; Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.12; and *PLRE*, II, p. 502 and Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen*, pp. 104ff.

⁷⁹ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.12 and 13. A family tree of the Hasding royal family is provided by Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 390.

⁸⁰ Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen*, p. 112; Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 300.

Victor of Tunnuna mentions only that Gunthamund recalled the exiled clergy immediately after having become king (*qui nostros protinus de exilio revocavit*).⁸¹ Schmidt interpreted the Reichenau version's *omnes Dei sacerdotes* as 'the rest of the orthodox clergy, held back for specific reasons'. He also totally rejects Victor of Tunnuna's account.⁸² Courtois, however, suggested that only laymen were allowed to return immediately, on the grounds that the Reichenau text suggests that Eugenius was excluded from the Carthage until 487AD. The clerics returned in 494 AD. In 487 AD the shrine of Agileus was returned, but the Catholic churches were not opened again until 10 August 494.⁸³

The martyr Agileus was killed during one of the persecutions in Carthage shortly before the Edict of Milan in 311. His name appears variously as Ageleus, Agileus and Galeus in medieval manuscripts. His feast was dated 25 January in the Carthaginian calendar and in the martyrology of Jerome. The Roman martyrology uses 15 October.⁸⁴ The basilica and the cemetery (*cymeterium sancti martyris Agilei*) were apparently highly regarded in Carthage and the populace awaited Fulgentius and the other clergy returning from exile in front of the martyr's basilica.⁸⁵ The great synod held on 5 February 525 with 60 bishops took place *in secretario basilicae sancti martyris Agilei*.⁸⁶ The grave of Agileus with the church was situated outside Carthage near the sea. Some of his relics were sent to Pope Gregory the Great by Archbishop Dominicus of Carthage in 601.⁸⁷ The church at Bir el Knissia south-east of Carthage has been identified as the shrine of Agileus, but this is far from certain.⁸⁸ It is striking that the church and the cemetery of Agileus are mentioned twice in the Reichenau version.

Eugenius was made bishop of Carthage in 480–81 and was the first to hold the office for 25 years, since the death of Bishop Deogratias in 456–57. Given that

⁸¹ Vict. Tun., a.479.2.

⁸² Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen*, p. 112f.

⁸³ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 300.

⁸⁴ H. Delehaye, *Hippolyti Delehaye Commentarius perpetuus in Martyrologium Hieronymianum ad recens* (Brussels, 1931), pp. 60 and 62; Hans Lietzmann, *Die drei ältesten Martyrologien* (Bonn 1903), p. 8; 'Agileus', in A. Baudrillart (ed.), *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclesiastiques*, 1 (Paris, 1912), p. 958; Pierre Baudot (ed.), *Vie des Saints et des Bienheureux selon l'ordre du calendrier avec l'historique des fêtes* (Paris, 1935–53), p. 457; *Acta Sanctorum*, J. Bollandus (ed.), vol. 7 (Antwerp, 1678, repr. Paris, 1878), c.15. Octobris, VII, pp. 7–10; Johann Stadler and Franz-Joseph Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligen-Lexikon oder Lebensgeschichten aller Heiligen, Seligen etc.*, vol. 1. A–D, (Augsburg 1858), p. 76. Omitting the 'A' at the beginning of a name was common in medieval scriptoria.

⁸⁵ Ferrandus, *VF.*, 29.56.

⁸⁶ G. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1767; repr. Graz, 1960), vol. 8, col. 636.

⁸⁷ *Ep XII.1*, in D. Norberg (ed.), CCSL, 140 (Turnhout, 1982). Baudot, *Vie des Saints*, p. 458.

⁸⁸ S. T. Stevens, 'Bir el Knissia at Carthage: A Rediscovered Cemetery Church. Report No. 1', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Suppl. Ser. 7 (1993); A. Ben Abed and N. Duval, 'Carthage, la capitale du royaume et les villes de Tunisie à l'époque vandale', in G. Ripoll and J. M. Gurt (eds), *Sedes Regiae (ann. 400–800)* (Barcelona, 2000), p. 193.

Eugenius' appointment took place through the intervention of Emperor Zeno and Placidia, and that his Greek name is rare in Africa, it is highly probable that the bishop was of eastern origin.⁸⁹ The *vir inlustris* Alexander was sent to Carthage with imperial authority to secure the appointment of a new bishop.⁹⁰ In Victor of Vita's prologue a pupil of Diadochus is named as the patron of the history.⁹¹ This person may have been the bishop Eugenius.⁹²

The testimony of Procopius and a letter of Gelasius do, however, challenge the image of Gunthamund's ecclesiastical policy as it appears in the Reichenau version. Procopius reports that Geiseric's grandson fought many battles against the Moors, but also that he persecuted the Catholics more harshly than his predecessors.⁹³ Procopius reported nothing else and simply assumed the persecutions to have continued.

The 95th letter of Gelasius, written on 1 February 496, describes Huneric's persecution and the resistance of the African Catholics. Apparently, these persecutions continued down to the time of writing: (*hodieque persecutoribus restistere non omittunt*).⁹⁴ The text is essentially a generalized attack upon the Arians and Vandals. Diesner argued that Gelasius' *persecutor* was intended to refer to Gunthamund personally, but the text speaks generally of persecutors, not of a particular king.

Victor of Tunnuna suggests that the dying King Thrasamund tried to convince his successor Hilderic not to reopen the Catholic churches and not to restore the privileges of the Church.⁹⁵ The Reichenau version describes the contrary actions of the new king: Bonifatius became the new bishop of Carthage in St Agileus' basilica and all anti-Catholic measures were cancelled, events only reported by analogy by Victor of Tunnuna.⁹⁶ The *Vita Fulgentii* records the same events, but omits the name of Bishop Bonifatius (in office 523 AD–36 AD).⁹⁷ The people of Carthage are presented with an *antistes*.⁹⁸ Immediately after this the *Vita* describes the entrance of the *confessores beatores* – Fulgentius and other exiled clergy – into Carthage. After having traversed the city and having visited the basilica of St. Agileus, the crowd arrived at bishop Bonifatius' palace and started to pray together with him.⁹⁹

⁸⁹ Courtois, *Victor de Vita*, pp. 21 ff.

⁹⁰ PCBE, pp. 362–5; Vict. Vit., HP., II.3ff. refers to this story at length.

⁹¹ Vict. Vit., HP., Prol. 2.

⁹² Courtois, *Victor de Vita*, pp. 20ff.; Schwarcz, 'Bedeutung und Textüberlieferung der Historia Persecutionis', p. 117ff.

⁹³ Procopius, BV., I.8.

⁹⁴ *Gelasii epistulum ad episcopos Dardaniae*, O. Günther (ed.), CSEL, 35 (Vienna, 1895), p. 391.

⁹⁵ Vict. Tun., a. 523.2; Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen*, p. 121.

⁹⁶ Vict. Tun., a. 523.2.

⁹⁷ Bonifatius 26, in PCBE, p. 159 f.

⁹⁸ Ferrandus, VF., 28.55: *Mors enim Trasamundi regis, et mirabilis bonitas Hilderic regnare incipientis, Ecclesiae catholicae per Africam constitutae libertatem restituens, Carthaginensi plebi proprium donavit antistitem, cunctisque in locis ordinationes pontificum fieri clementissima auctoritate mandavit.*

⁹⁹ Ferrandus, VF., 29.56.

To support my hypothesis of a specific style or variety of script, I identify its salient features, and present other examples, taken from the papyri, illustrating its use in other bureaucratic and military contexts. I then suggest that its use on the Îlot de l'Amirauté sherds indicates the presence either of soldiers or of militarily trained clerks, working in the *annona* operation in the Carthage ports. As a way into this discussion, however, I will briefly consider the ostraka themselves.

Most of the sherd texts were published in 1998, with photographs and an extensive interpretative commentary by Theodore Peña.³ The ostraka had been excavated as a lot in 1911 on the small island known as the Îlot de l'Amirauté.⁴ This island lies within the port area of the city of Carthage. Henry Hurst believes the findspot to have been within a small section of the north-eastern corner of the island, and he further suggests that the site was within the buildings upon it that functioned as the offices of the Roman *annona* administration.⁵ These documents were probably, therefore, produced and used by the *annona* administrators.

Several of the sherds bear the name and title: *Felix mensor olei fori Karthaginis*.⁶ 'Felix' must have been one of a specialized group of *ensores* engaged in quantifying the olive oil received into the Carthage port from the outlying regions, prior to its shipment onwards to Rome. The *ensores*, therefore, seem to have been responsible for the writing of the documentation. They probably had their working premises on the Îlot de l'Amirauté, which would itself have been within the forum area. Hurst proposes that the term '*fori Karthaginis*', as it occurs on the sherds, refers to a specialized site at the port, rather than to the city's municipal forum.⁷ Some of the sherd documents almost certainly record deliveries into this olive oil forum and the subsequent transfer of the same into storehouses (*conditoria*).⁸ The storehouses would in all likelihood also have stood within the *forum Karthaginis*.

(Clerical and Sub-Clerical Grades)', *JRS*, 39 (1949), esp. pp. 43–6; also A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602* (Oxford, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 565–6, on the composition of the provincial governor's office in the Later Empire. On this latter topic, see also B. Rankov, 'The Governor's Men: The Officium Consularis', in A. K. Goldsworthy (ed.), *The Roman Army as a Community*, *JRA*, Suppl. Ser., 34 (1999), pp. 15–34.

³ J. T. Peña, 'The Mobilization of State Olive Oil in Roman Africa: The Evidence of Late 4th-c Ostraca from Carthage', in J. T. Peña (ed.), *Carthage Papers: The early colony's economy, water supply, a public bath and the mobilization of state olive oil*, *JRA*, Suppl. Ser., 28 (1998), pp. 116–238. All classification and numbering of the ostraka that I use in this chapter is Peña's, which I use for convenience of reference.

⁴ Found by M. Lt. Esmiol and reported in *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité Travaux* for 1911, p. ccxxxviii; *AE* 1912, nos 61 et seqq. There are 32 pieces in total, and of these 23 fragments or complete sherds are now published, leaving nine pieces as yet unedited.

⁵ H. Hurst, 'The Site Finds Other than the Pottery', *Excavations at Carthage, The British Mission II, 1. The Circular Harbour, North Side* (Oxford, 1994), p. 111.

⁶ This identification appears on the Group 1 ostraka nos: 2 verso ll. 3–4; 3 verso ll. 4–5; 4 verso ll. 4–5; 5 verso ll. 4–5; and also possibly no. 1 (no longer legible).

⁷ Hurst draws a comparison in support of this hypothesis with the specialized wine forum at Ostia, the 'forum vinarium'. See H. Hurst, 'Excavations at Carthage 1977–8. Fourth Interim Report', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 59 (1979), p. 47.

⁸ Several bear the words: *felix mensor olei fori karthag(iniensis) suscepimus*

which rises away from the hand, the deleterious effect of the curvature on the writing is minimized.¹⁷

The regular shape of many of these potsherds strongly suggests their organized production as writing materials. Peña comments:

Given the care involved in the preparation ... it seems likely that, rather than being manufactured on the spot as needed, they were cut well beforehand, the functionaries responsible for the record-keeping operations keeping a supply of pre-cut blanks on hand.¹⁸

Taking this to be the case, the care taken over the manufacture and ready availability of ostraka implies their well-established integration within the clerical administrative system. It may also suggest that the information that they carried was at least of some lasting importance and not purely ephemeral. Steps may also have been taken against the loss of any of this information, and towards its organization or archiving. They could have been stored in purpose-made 'filing cabinets' or 'drawers', and a shield shaped sherd regularly cut is conducive to this kind of treatment.¹⁹ Peña has a photograph of a reconstruction of such a drawer, or 'filing cabinet'. Indeed, perhaps what we have is the contents of just such a container.²⁰ If these sherds were kept and stored in this way, the information they carried must have been intended to have a certain permanence.

There is also some evidence that the information in this administrative archive needed to be easily retrievable. All of the sherds carry a date in the first line (where this is still visible) – at the top. A particular day's record could easily be found, because the dates on each sherd were immediately visible if flicking through the file drawer. As a further searching aid, these dates are carefully written with a finer instrument, and the ink used for them is slightly paler in colour than that used for the bulk of the text.²¹ Chronological sequence may well have been used in the storage system to facilitate structured access to the written material.

Enough has already been said to warn against any presumption that a person who wrote on ostraka in the ancient world was necessarily poor or of low status. It is easy

¹⁷ There are exceptions to this: Peña's groups 1A and 2A written on both internal and external sides. There are also some irregularities in the direction in which the writing runs on the ostraka of these groups.

¹⁸ Peña, 'The Mobilization', p. 120.

¹⁹ Interestingly, it is North Africa which provides the only other example known to me of a rectangular shaped ostrakon (that from Ksar Koutine) which was also produced in a professional organized context. (419 AD). See: G. Bartoletto and I. Pescini, *Fonti Documentarie in Scrittura Latina – Repertorio (sec. vii a.C. vii. d.C)* (Florence, 1994), no. 1049.

²⁰ Peña, 'The Mobilization', p. 121. See also N. Horsfall, 'Statistics or States of Mind?', in M. Beard et al. (eds), *Literacy in the Roman World*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Suppl. Ser., 3 (Ann Arbor, MI, 1991), p. 67, for examples of storage methods for tablets. Wilcken, *Griechische Ostraca*, vol. 1, p. 19 mentions that in a Babrius fable a chest or cupboard is used as storage for ostraka.

²¹ The summation in the final line is also written in enlarged and carefully embellished letters.

for modern writers to make such a mistake. In the ancient world, however, writing surfaces would often have been hard to come by, and suitable, available and affordable surfaces, by modern standards, did not actually exist. Early examples of writing on sherds are numerous, although admittedly there are few other Latin examples.²² Interestingly all other ostraka bearing Latin texts yet discovered have been found in North Africa. In a hot, dry climate, potsherds make a very functional writing surface. Robert Marichal stresses the overall usefulness of this writing material in his edition of the large collection of sherd texts from the military camp at Bu Njem in Tripolitania:

Les amphores étaient les seuls récipients pour le transport du vin, de l'huile, des conserves et des condiments; elles étaient systématiquement brisées après usage; leur engobe prenait bien l'encre; leurs tessons constituaient donc un matériau qu'on avait toujours sous la main dans tous les lieux habités et qui ne coûtait rien – sur tous les sites archéologiques se voient des jonchées de milliers voire de centaines de milliers de tessons...²³

In the context of the Carthage ports in particular, sherds must have been readily available. Even allowing for the possibility of purpose-oriented manufacture, they would have cost almost nothing. As all the North African ostraka abundantly prove, they also take the usual black, carbon-based ink well and retain it almost indefinitely.

We know that one common use of ostraka in the ancient world was for the writing up of tax documentation.²⁴ Exactly what purpose the ostraka from the Ilôt de l'Amirauté helped serve is not fully clear, beyond their involvement in the 'paperwork' generated by the *annona* collection operation. Peña, as has been noted, suggests that these sherds document some aspect of the logistics of the arrival of the olive oil into the Carthage forum, and its quantification and movement and storage within this same area. He does not broach the reason or reasons why this information may have been important, and important to keep. It may be the case that Peña has undervalued or overlooked the potential significance of the archive as a whole. However, it would far exceed my brief to enter into this question here.

Peña identifies a number of different scribes at work in these ostraka and he counts eleven different writers in total. This is a high number, and it would imply

²² In Latin, and from a third-century military context, a large collection of sherds has been preserved from Bu Njem, Tripolitania. These contain records of camp activities, reports, and so on and also copies of correspondence. See Marichal, *Les Ostraca de Bu Njem*, *passim*. and for a list of other Latin ostraka, pp. 3–4. On ostraka archives see E. Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), p. 228.

²³ Marichal, *Les Ostraca de Bu Njem*, p. 3: 'Amphorae alone were the transport containers for wine, oil, conserved foodstuffs and spices. They were systematically broken after use. Their surface takes ink well. Their sherds thus make a material that is always to hand in all inhabited areas, and which costs nothing – all the archaeological sites are littered with thousands, even hundreds of thousands of sherds' (my translation).

²⁴ Tax documentation must have been widespread and the term covers a large range of document types.

the involvement of many literate workers in the administrative operations. To my mind however, while there clearly are a number of clerks or scribes at work, there are perhaps only two sherds (nos. 7 and 8) of which it can be stated with some confidence that they were written by the same person. It is otherwise extremely difficult to be able to point out and distinguish different writers. There are several reasons for this. The quality of the presented writing surface differs from sherd to sherd, and the writing implements (almost certainly reed pens) are inconstant in thickness and fitness for purpose. Again, if the collection is the work of several different writers, then there can be little comparative material to work from. It is not easy therefore, if possible at all, to make a good assessment of any particular writer's personal graphic profile.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that, while there may indeed be several different scribes involved in the drawing up of these documents, the overall similarity between the handwriting of each clerk is far easier to observe than are any major differences. This point needs to be kept hold of, and the conclusion to be drawn from it is that all the scribes involved in the work at Carthage had received, at some point or other, the same instruction in writing. It is this instruction that enabled their collective production of their particular handwriting style. That they have a collective style also means that their writing education was both well-organized and structured. Quite some time must have been expended on the teaching of clearly defined, well-understood letterforms together with rules for their formation. Generally speaking, all the scribes use the same penstrokes to build up their letters and follow the same idealized models of letter shapes, as well as using similar ornamentation and style.²⁵ The forms that they produced are very like each other, even in their finer details. This cannot be the result of chance or of haphazard writing tuition. The uniformity in script on this sherd collection was brought about by transmission to the whole group of definite and regimented writing techniques within which there is little toleration of difference.

In Figure 9.1, I reproduce an alphabet taken from one of the sherds of the collection.²⁶ It should be considered generally representative of that used on the ostraka of the Ilôt de l'Amirauté archive as a whole.²⁷ The scribes are accomplished writers. Generally, their script is upright (as is to be expected for the period), and for

²⁵ Roman writers build up their letters in series of composite strokes; a technique that has been appropriately called 'l'exécution fractionnée'. See: E. Pouille, 'Discussions: Une Histoire de l'Écriture', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 135 (1977), pp. 137–44.

²⁶ Peña's No. 13. – with the exception of *h* and *q* which do not occur on it. *h* in this case is taken from Peña's no. 2, *q* from his no. 11. Peña publishes a photograph of it at Figure 8, 136. In general, the black ink on most of the ostraka has survived remarkably well, is water-resistant and can be read without difficulty with the naked eye.

²⁷ The Appendix shows the range of variations in letterforms present in the collection as a whole. In this appendix, in a manner more comprehensive than was possible for the alphabet taken from sherd no. 13 in Figure 9.1, I have included the alternative or variant letterforms that occur on the Ilôt de l'Amirauté ostraka. A variant of a letterform is a form that is different in its morphology to another form, but yet can, within what appears an almost identical

letters that have long vertical strokes, these are well defined and elongated. They also have stylised loops at their tops and these should be noted as a feature of the script.²⁸ The top strokes of *c*, *e* and sometimes *s*, progress strongly in a rightward oblique direction, and these break up the otherwise vertical aspect of the script as a whole, and again they are a marked feature of it. In Figure 9.1 individual letterforms have been isolated from their graphic context, and ligatured or joining strokes between letters have been cut off. But in general, horizontal strokes (such as the mid-stroke of *e* and top strokes of *g* and *t*) should be understood as joining uninterruptedly to a following letter. This shows the rapid movement and fluency of the scribes. Other characteristics, such as the lead-in strokes on *b*, *h*, *i* (where it is long or 'capital') and *l*, also reveal the flow of the writing, and the letters *d* and *s* are often written in one stroke, although in this period less competent or less speedy scribes invariably form these two letters in two separated strokes – *d* sometimes in three.

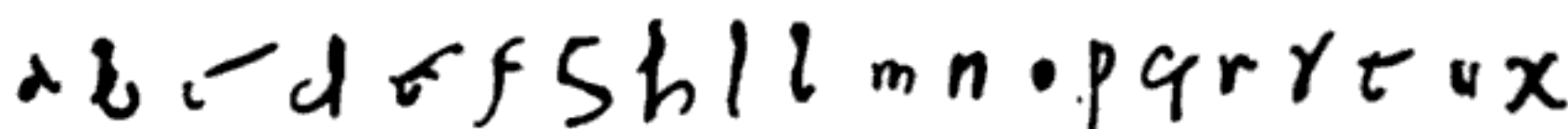


Figure 9.1 Letterforms from the Ilôt de l'Amirauté archive

Throughout the Carthage collection, the writing is clear and regular and it has a certain finesse.²⁹ Despite being written at speed, the letters hold their shapes and the script does not break down as a consequence but remains legible throughout. To maintain legibility in such circumstances is not, as most modern writers will be aware, lightly done. It means that all the scribes collectively followed rigid rules for letter formation, which ensure the preservation of similar forms even when under stress. It also implies their general comfort in writing, which can only have been achieved by long practice.

context, represent the same letter. In almost all handwriting, the use of at least one variant for several of the letters of the alphabet is common and it is usually difficult to find reasons for the writer having chosen to use one form rather than another. The Appendix to this chapter shows all of the main letter variants found upon the sherds.

As an example, within the category *r* on the ostraka, there are at least two clear alternative forms: one which stands on the line, and one which has a curved descending 'tail'. Palaeographically it is important to distinguish these forms from each other and these two forms would each be termed variants of *r*. Neither form of *r* is otherwise unknown in this script variety. The type that stands on the line occurs also in the script of the Theophanes archive (Figure 9.3); that with the tail in the earliest examples of military LRC (Figure 9.2). *n*, which, in Figure 9.1 is in the minuscule 'lowercase' form, also occurs on some sherds in the majuscule 'capital' form. Therefore the almost exclusive appearance of majuscule *n* in the papyri described here does not differentiate their script from that of the ostraka, since majuscule *n* is found on some of the sherds.

²⁸ They probably initially arose as a consequence of fast treatment and fluid writing.

²⁹ There is one hand only which is an exception to this rule and seems to be written by a not very competent writer: no. 1 exterior. This scribe is probably a visiting *navicularius* and not a worker at the port.

Little information has yet been uncovered about the training of scribes and writers in the later empire, but some observations have been made about the nature of late-Roman script. In widespread use throughout the period, and dominant in the fourth-century evidence, is the alphabet known as 'New' or 'Later Roman Cursive' (LRC).³⁰ The Ilôt de l'Amirauté ostraka follow the generalized LRC morphological model.³¹ But LRC is a catch-all category and it oversimplifies the picture. In the study of handwriting it is important not to overlook small but significant details. Indeed I maintain that the script on the Carthage ostraka exemplifies not just LRC, but a particular sub-variety of the LRC alphabet. This variety Otto Kresten some time ago described as a 'very fluent and elegant new Roman cursive'. While drawing attention to its characteristic features, he also defined it by its function. In his words, this script type is 'die Schriften deren sich die höhen Provinzialbehörden der Spätantike bedienten'.³² I think that Kresten is probably right, although his notion of 'höhen', or 'high', needs some qualification. There is a provincial authority script, but it has a hierarchy within it. The hierarchy is expressed in the size of the letters and in the degree of their ornamentation.³³ Examples are given below.

I also suggest in this chapter that the details of the provincial authority style were worked out in military practice. But this is a suggestion rather than a proven conviction at this stage. Overall, the evidence seems to support the idea that a specific script-type was in use by bureaucratic authorities, or more accurately, by the clerks responsible for their documents, and the script of the Carthage ostraka is of this type. These sherds carry a variety of fourth-century handwriting which was used and propagated by the bureaucracy of the later empire, and therefore they were written by people who belonged to this group. The style must have been taught to them, and although we do not know where or how their training was given, a guess that it might have been within the army cannot be ruled out.

A few surviving papyri show that the army had introduced the new LRC minuscule style into the range of scripts considered acceptable for military or

³⁰ For an introduction to this terminology see A. K. Bowman and J. D. Thomas, *Vindolanda: The Latin Writing-tablets*, Britannia Monograph, 4 (London, 1983), pp. 51–69.

³¹ With the exception of some (probably specialized) abbreviation symbols in use in this specific context.

³² O. Kresten, 'Diplomatische Auszeichnungsschriften in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter', *MIÖG*, 74 (1966), p. 12: 'The scripts that the high Provincial authorities of late Antiquity use'. In my opinion, Kresten unfortunately confuses its meaning by including under it some examples of LRC sub-varieties which do not belong in the same group – notably from the fourth-century Vienna, National Bibliothek, Pap. Vindob. L.31 (a, b and c), (*ChLA* XLIV, 1264).

³³ A rescript of Valentinian I to the Proconsul of Africa is preserved in *C.Th.* IX.19.3, which reserves the exclusive right of a script called *litterae caelestes* to the Imperial Chancery while provincial chancery scribes are permitted only to use *litterae communes*. Although it is not known what *litterae communes* refers to, the rescript reveals that differing script types were certainly recognized and differentiated in function. On *litterae caelestes* among others, see R. Marichal, 'L'Écriture Latine de la Chancellerie Impériale', *Aegyptus*, 32 (1952), pp. 337–59.

by the army for use at least in its internal affairs. The script must also by this date have been included on the military training syllabus.³⁹

The general shift towards the new style LRC script was completed in the fourth century, and from then distinctions between varieties of LRC began to be developed. Different sectors of the literate population evolved their own writing methods with the recently established minuscule alphabet. The surviving evidence shows a range of distinct varieties or sub-types within the basic LRC generalization. We would expect the development of specific sub-types to be governed by the nature of the particular purpose of the document. It would also depend on the identity or affiliation of the person or group on whose behalf the writing was carried out. In fact we know that in Roman practice the rank of the delegating authority was an influential factor on script style.⁴⁰ We have evidence for this from various parts of the Roman world. Indicating status was probably a tradition which was built up by the gradual and careful establishment of norms of propriety and document decorum. We have several examples of its use in military contexts and it was extensively discussed by Robert Marichal in his work on the Dura-Europos papyri.⁴¹

In the third-century documentation from the military base at Dura, Marichal noticed differentiations in script that were based upon hierarchy or the relative ranks of the writers, and also upon other factors, in particular upon the nature or content of the document in question. He distinguished more than five different script stylizations or varieties, to all of which he gave names. For example, and most clearly, he contrasts the *écriture chancelleresque* used by the office of the Syrian governor (actually copies of these made at the Dura camp) with the more workaday *écriture bureaucratique* in use for some of the camp internal documentation. In his comparison between these two scripts Marichal points out that the differences are not in the letterforms themselves, for morphologically speaking the same letters are common to both types. The differences between the two consists in the stylization of letters and differentiation is in features such as ornamentation of the letters or lack of it, and especially in variations and contrasts in size. The *écriture chancelleresque*, for example, has letters twice the size of those in *écriture bureaucratique*.⁴²

The style 'code' that the Dura papyri illustrate, is a feature which passes into and survives in LRC. In bureaucratic practice fourth-century LRC has a developing

³⁹ An alternative, which personally I find less likely, is that military script-teaching programmes had fallen away at this time allowing permeation of external influences.

⁴⁰ Otto Kresten believes this is not just Roman practice but closer to something universal, see Kresten, 'Diplomatische Auszeichnungsschriften', p. 33: 'die Bestrebungen, der Schrift gewisse Auszeichnungsformen zu verleihen, sind so typisch menschlich, dass sie fast überall nachweisen lassen.' ('The efforts to confer upon script certain distinctive forms, are so typically human that they can be found almost everywhere.') (my translation).

⁴¹ *ChLA* VI–IX; and R. Marichal, 'Preface', *ChLA*, IX 1977, 15–18. Many of the claims that he makes here are borne out and supported in his work on the army documents from Bu Njem.

⁴² Kresten maintains that enlarging or magnification of script to show status can be found in Ptolemaic documents.

range of purpose-defined varieties or subtypes.⁴³ The status of the originators of documents is still marked in the script of this period, for instance. In neither the earlier or the later Roman periods is there one overwhelming monolithic form of writing, but instead close analysis reveals differentiating systems based on particular stylizations and ornamentations of letters. Such systems make apparent at a glance who might have written the document in question and the type of information it might be expected to contain. It suggests to us, when we discover it today, something of the quantity and the quality of the training in writing that clerks, and in particular military clerks, must have received.⁴⁴

In the attempt made here to pinpoint the particular script variety used by the writers of the Ilôt de l'Amirauté ostraka, comparison can be made, perhaps surprisingly, with the script preserved in some important fourth-century papyri from elevated circles within the bureaucracy, for example that in two Latin papyri from the so-called 'Archive of Theophanes' (Manchester, John Rylands Library P. Ryl. Gk 623; and Strasbourg BN P. Lat. 1.)⁴⁵ These two papyri originated from the same source – the office of Vitalis who was probably *rationalis* of Egypt.⁴⁶ Figure 9.3 shows a composite alphabet taken from both, the morphology of which is recognizably LRC.⁴⁷ Each contains a letter, and was written within the span of the years 317–24 AD. They bear the same text (although with different addressees): a

⁴³ See, for example two particular extreme varieties of the script: Vienna, National Bibliothek, Pap. Vindob. L. 31 (a, b and c), (300 AD. – first part of year), (*ChLA* XLIV, 1264) was issued by the chancellery office of the Praeses of Arcadia; and Wien, National Bibliothek, Pap. Vindob. L119, Pap. Vindob. L120 & Pap. Vindob. L121 (*ChLA* XLV 1328, 1329 and 1330) – (March 399) – receipts written by a notary. Despite their radically different appearances, that the morphology of each is LRC, cannot be disputed.

⁴⁴ It is as yet difficult to perceive the full effect of the bias created by the fact that so much of the surviving evidence comes from military contexts.

⁴⁵ *ChLA* Nos. IV, 253 and XIX, 687.

⁴⁶ We must assume that the letters were written by Vitalis' secretary. Theophanes, whom the letters concern, was an important official on Vitalis' staff. The letters were written in connection with a visit Theophanes made to the East and the purpose of his journey may have been connected with the financial preparation for the civil war. See C. H. Roberts, 'A Footnote to the Civil War of AD 324', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 21 (1945), p. 113; A. Moscati, 'Le lettere dell'archivio di Teofane', *Aegyptus*, 50 (1970), pp. 88–154. Also in this archive is P. Yale Inv. 590, although this is not written in the same variety of LRC. It contains a letter from a certain Sperantius addressed to Vitalis. (c.317–24 AD) (*ChLA* IX, 398).

⁴⁷ I do not allow the appearance in P. Ryl. 623 of a *b* with the ductus of ORC, that is, with its bowl on the left of the stem to prevent classification of this script as LRC. The *b* is clearly archaic and may mark the higher status of Vitalis. There are some circles and contexts in which the old style *b* continues in use, the latest recorded example being from the year 585. It is always a mark of rank. I think it is probable however that the letter comes to belong to legal and diplomatic contexts and that it dies out in military and bureaucratic 'official'. See: J.-O. Tjäder, 'Considerazioni e proposte sulla scrittura latina nell'età romana', in *Palaeographica, diplomatica et archivistica. Studi in onore di Giulio Battelli*, 1 (Rome, 1979), pp. 31–60; and for a list of documents in LRC containing ORC *b* see: J.-O. Tjäder, *Die Nichtliterarischen Papyri Italiens aus der Zeit 445–700* (Lund, 1955), p. 98.

The unusual form of *d* in Figure 9.3 is also exemplified in the script of the ostraka (Appendix line 1).

letter of recommendation from Vitalis, for Theophanes. They are almost certainly the work of the same scribe, presumably Vitalis' secretary, being such close replicas of each other that, were the name of the addressee not present, it would be hard to tell them apart. Given Vitalis' position, his secretary may have been a soldier, at least in some capacity. Be that as it may, the eminence of the *rationalis* is shown in these letters by the large module of the main script.⁴⁸ The letters are far larger than those on the Carthage sherds, but the similarity of certain details in the stylization of the letters in both cases should be observed. In particular, notice the elongated vertical strokes of the letters *b*, *i* and *l*, with the decorative loops at their tops.

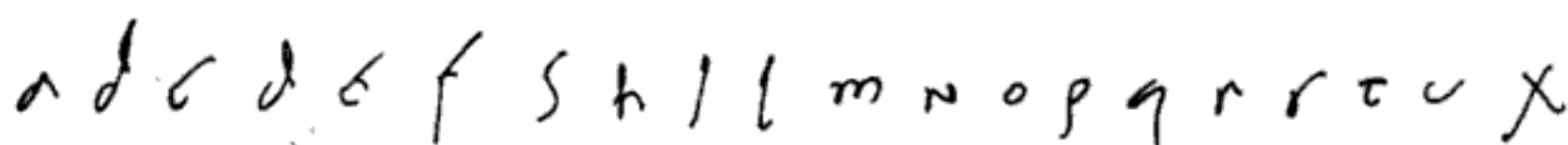


Figure 9.3 Letterforms from Manchester, John Rylands Library P. Ryl. GK 623 and Strasbourg BN P. Lat. 1

Two further Latin papyri written in a script similar in style. London, BL. P.447 (Figure 9.4a) and Geneva, P. Lat.III (Figure 9.4b) belong to the so-called 'Flavius Abinnaeus archive'.⁴⁹ This archive contains personal documents, emanating from a not particularly high-ranking military officer, Flavius Abinnaeus, most of which are written in Greek, since he was stationed in Egypt. BL. P.447 (341–42 AD) is a draft or rough of a Latin petition, presumably written by Abinnaeus' secretary. Again, therefore, this script is the work of a military clerk. His writing is recognizably similar in style to that used by Vitalis' clerk, although Abinnaeus' secretary, who was drafting and probably working to dictation, was writing at speed. His haste was responsible for doubling of penstrokes on all the characteristically lengthened vertical ascenders, instead of carefully forming the loops at their tops. I assume that once the drafting process was finished, Abinnaeus' secretary would have proceeded to write up this document 'in fair', in a tidier form of what would have been essentially the same script.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ There are probably three hands in this papyrus. The hand I discuss here is responsible for the bulk of the document. The other two, one of which in particular is very different in character, are 'signatures' to the letter.

⁴⁹ *ChLA* nos I, 8 and III, 202.

⁵⁰ There has been some doubt about whether the scribe or whether Flavius Abinnaeus himself is responsible for the rewriting, but I believe the writer of both parts of this papyrus to be the same. We do not know at what stage in his life he learned to write the script but it certainly seems an automatic and natural hand to him. The text has been rewritten in places as part of the drafting process, above and around deleted passages. The character of the rewriting hand, though smaller in module, is otherwise extremely similar to the main hand of the document, which might suggest that the scribe preserves this hand naturally even when 'scribbling'.

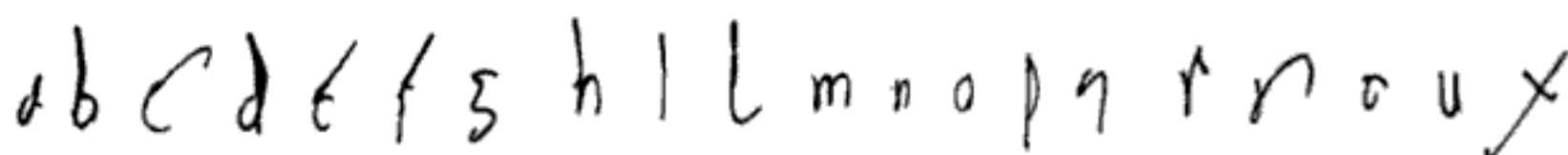


Figure 9.4a Letterforms from London, BL. P. 447 (50 per cent reduction)

Also among the Abinnaeus papers is the Geneva papyrus P. Lat. III (344 AD), a letter from the *Dux Aegypti* (written by his military secretary) to Abinnaeus informing him of his dismissal as *praefectus alae*. Its script belongs to this same military bureaucratic variety.⁵¹ Particularly clear in this example is the characteristic looping of the ascending letters, as well as the strong shooting forward of oblique top strokes on *c*, *e* and *s*. Preserved in the Flavius Abinnaeus archive, therefore, are documents emanating from two members of fundamentally the same institution, who correspond with each other in a script that their secretaries share. In the form of their documentation, metaphorically speaking, these soldiers can recognize each other's 'uniform'.

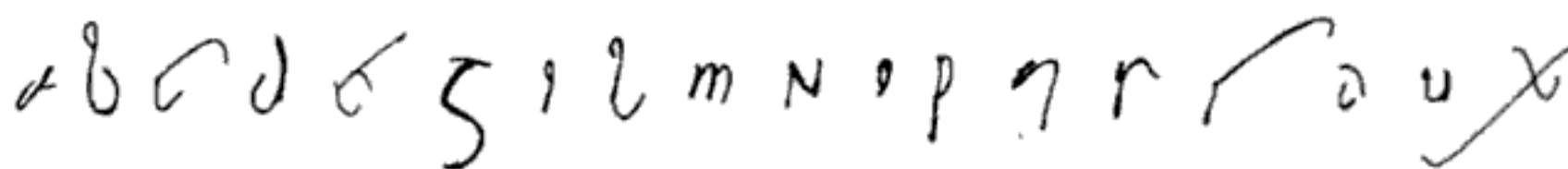


Figure 9.4b Letterforms from Geneva, P. Lat. III (50 per cent reduction)

The famous and much-reproduced writing of the copy of the Rescript of Diocletian and Maximian on the Privileges of Athletes and Actors (Leipzig, P Inv 530 — Figure 9.5) also belongs to this same sub-variety of script.⁵² The alphabet is a substantially smaller module script than those in Figures 9.3 and 9.4, and much closer to the module of the letters on the ostraka. All the features to which I have already drawn attention as characteristic of this script sub-type are again in evidence on this papyrus.⁵³ Note the emphasized contrast in size between those letters that have ascenders and those without them. This scribe also has a pleasing tendency towards lateral expansion which counters the strong effect of the vertical strokes, and several letters are wide, notably perhaps the letter *d*. The breadth of this letter here forces a ductus in which it is executed in two strokes.⁵⁴

A calligraphic *pièce*, this papyrus contains what must be a privately commissioned (but professionally written) copy of this rescript. The dating (293–305 AD) is a *terminus post quem* given by the date of the issuing of the rescript itself. On the basis of the similarity of its script to the other papyri in this group its

⁵¹ Regrettably there is no letter *f* or letter *h* in this document.

⁵² *ChLA* XII, 526.

⁵³ The illustration shows the two variant forms of *r* which co-occur in it without apparent discrimination.

⁵⁴ The penlift between the two is visible in the illustration. Note the loop at the top of the ascender that is formed thereby.

ChLA editor thinks it would be more appropriate to date this copy rather closer to the middle of the fourth century. He also believes that the scribe made his copy from an 'original' copy of the rescript. If this is correct, then it might be assumed that the original was kept in an official archive and the scribe was allowed access to that archive, at least for the purpose of making this particular copy. The scribe did not understand the text that he was writing which may indicate his Egyptian (Greek-speaking) origin, and might show that his scribal training in Latin scripts was acquired in a context in which linguistic proficiency was not a prerequisite. Somebody who knew how to write Latin in fourth-century Egypt may well have been a soldier, or have had military writing training.⁵⁵



Figure 9.5 Letterforms from Leipzig, P. Inv. 530 (50 per cent reduction)

In the early fifth century, some 30 years after the writing of the *Ilôt de l'Amirauté* ostraka and almost a century after the writing of the script of Ann Arbor, Uni. Of Mich. P. Inv. 5271e (Figure 9.2a above), the army was still training scribes to write in this same fashion. Vienna, Nat. Bibl. Pap. Vindob. L8 and L125 was written in or after the year 401.(Figure 9.6).⁵⁶ A large sheet of papyrus (made up of two pieces glued together), it contains three letters recording the stages of the military career of a certain *decurio Sarapion*. They are copies, and were very probably taken from the army archives and written by an army scribe.⁵⁷ The main script of the document is written rapidly and clearly, if a little less formally than some of the earlier examples I have illustrated here, but overall the handwriting style remains close to them.⁵⁸

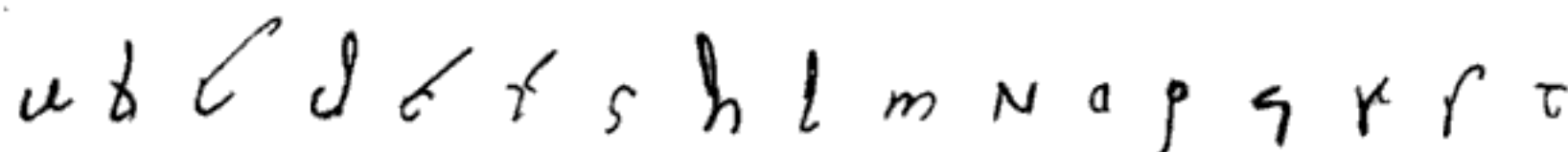


Figure 9.6 Letterforms from Vienna, Nat. Bibl. Pap. Vindob. L8 and L125 (50 per cent reduction)

In summary, the examples of writing that I have shown in this chapter seem to bear out Kresten's assertion that there was a specific script type in use by the provincial authorities of this period, which had distinctly recognizable features.

⁵⁵ In his work both on the Dura papyri and the Bu Njem ostraka, Robert Marichal demonstrated that a possible scenario for an army scribe is proficiency in Latin script with no more than a basic proficiency in the Latin language.

⁵⁶ *ChLA* XLIII, 1248.

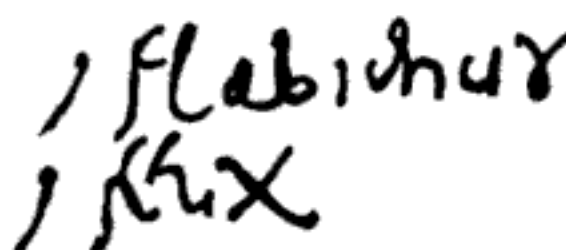
⁵⁷ Sarapion was stationed at Psoft(h)is in Egypt. The copying of the letters must postdate the date of Sarapion's retirement from the military in AD 401.

⁵⁸ Some letters have variant forms, for example small squat forms of *c*, and *e*. Note also for example, that *a* begins to break down under the influence of speed. This is the shape that the letter was to take on in both formal and informal scripts of the fifth and sixth centuries.

When used by writers of superior rank (or their staff) as in the Theophanes archive for example, it was enlarged to show their status, in a practice similar to that used at Dura. The morphological form of the letters was not generally otherwise altered and its distinct aspect or stylistic features were recognizably preserved.

The certainty that at least the scripts shown in Figures 9.2, 9.3, 9.4 and 9.6, if not also 9.5, were written in military contexts, means that the similarities between them may well be attributable to the employment in the army or at least to the army training of the secretarial scribes who wrote them. Whether or not this is the case, Figures 9.3–9.6 show alphabets that are all recognizable examples of a distinct sub-type of LRC. The script on the ostraka from the Ilôt de l'Amirauté, in my opinion, belongs firmly with this group.⁵⁹

Since the script of the Ilôt de l'Amirauté ostraka belongs to this identified script variety, whoever wrote them has similar affiliations to the writers of the other documents in the group and received a similar training in writing. It is extremely likely that these Carthage *annona* clerks, who wrote so well and so fluently, would have received their writing training in, or by virtue of, the army. I cannot prove this thesis here, but there is one other small piece of evidence on the sherds that their writers had military associations. The standard abbreviation for *centurio* is to be found upon several ostraka, preceding each name in the lists of names (as in Figure 9.7 for example). This symbol is used in military epigraphy and occurs on other papyri from military contexts.⁶⁰



(centenarius) flabianus

(centenarius) felix

Figure 9.7 From the beginning of lines 2 and 3, ostrakon no. 13, from the Ilôt de l'Amirauté archive

⁵⁹ Kresten, 'Diplomatische Auszeichnungsschriften', speaks of the strong desire for form (his word is 'Gestaltungswille'), that this script type has. He also draws attention to the strong movement in the rightward extension of the top strokes in which he sees a definite artistic/artificial method. ('Kunstmittel'). The further features of the script that he isolates are as follows:

- i. the vertical aspect of the writing;
- ii. the emphasis given to this by long ascenders and descenders on those letters that have them (approximately four or five times body height);
- iii. the characterization of the long vertical strokes: descenders are often curved to the left at the base, and ascenders, particularly of the letters *b* and *h* are hooked or looped in the approach stroke at the top;
- iv. shooting right oblique strokes on the letters *c*, *s*, *e* and *f* in particular;
- v. the tendency to roundness and wideness in the spaces internal to the letters (the counter space).

These features are all exhibited in all the documents illustrated so far.

⁶⁰ For example, on the papyrus Ann Arbor, University of Michigan P. Inv. 5271e (P. Mich. 592). (*ChLA* V, No. 298) – list of soldiers, shown in Figure 9.2a above.

Peña transcribes this symbol *centenarius* and this implies that he believes that the sign once used to signify *centurio*, transferred or extended its meaning to include the new and related rank *centenarius*. He notes that Vegetius records that *centuriones* in his day were known as *centenarii*.⁶¹ Whether or not those *centenarii* were working soldiers or civil or government workers using a system, the terminology of which was based on military practice, is less important for the purposes of this chapter than the observation that the clerks wrote in a recognizable style.

That there is a specific and identifiable military/bureaucratic writing style in the fourth century has been the central contention of this chapter, although the subject bears far more extensive treatment than I have been able to give it here. But the most literate and the most bureaucratically organized sector in the Roman Empire was, and by necessity had probably always been, the army, which depended on literate communication skills in so many areas of its activities.⁶² Overall, there is now plentiful evidence from the Roman world that the military had sophisticated and detailed clerical and administrative systems. The clerks of the ostraka from the Îlot de l'Amirauté confirm once again, in the details of their handwriting, the enduring power and the wide reach of the Roman army, and the discipline its service entailed.

⁶¹ Peña, 'The Mobilization', p. 145, n. 21. Vegetius, *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, L. F. Stelten (ed. and tr.), American University Studies, 17. (New York, 1990), 13: *centuriones qui nunc centenarii vocantur*. Although *centenarius* may simply be a pay grade in the civil service, yet *centenarius* is a known rank in the army of a later period. Certain *centenarii*, more fully known as *centenarii burgi*, perhaps took their title from an association with the forts they commanded. See: R. Grosse, *Römische Militärgeschichte von Gallienus bis zum Beginn der byzantinischen Themenverfassung* (Berlin, 1920, repr. New York, 1975), p. 117; P. Gauckler, 'Centenarius, Terme d'Art Militaire', in *Mélanges Perrot* (Paris, 1903), pp. 125–31 esp. pp. 126–7, 130. There are inscriptions naming 'burgi centenarii' in Africa *CIL* VIII, Suppl. 3.20215 and Suppl. 4.22759 and also *CIL* V, 8771.

⁶² E. Best, 'The Literate Roman Soldier', *The Classical Journal*, 62 (1966), pp. 122–7; for a critique of Best, cf. W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), pp. 166–7; although Harris at p. 217 also comments: 'the army came to be an especially bureaucratized milieu.' See also N. Horsfall, 'Statistics or states of mind?'. I. Bilkei, 'Römische Schreibgeräte aus Pannonien', *Albia Regia*, 18 (1980), p. 73 observes that archaeological finds indicate that *Schriftkultur* is related to military environments.

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Chapter 10

Literacy and Private Documentation in Vandal North Africa: The Case of the Albertini Tablets¹

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To the inhabitants of late Roman Hippo Regius, business was an inherently written phenomenon. Individual businessmen might be unable to read or write, but they relied on the literate services of their employees to turn a profit. ‘For we know other businessmen’, Augustine once preached to a restless audience, ‘who, because they do not know letters, need literate men to work for them; and though they themselves are ignorant of letters, they rake in enormous profits with others writing their accounts’.² The account-books of Augustine’s *negotiatores* are indicative of the extent to which the written word had penetrated late antique society. More than a decade of recent scholarship has demonstrated that, while literacy may not have been as widespread in the ancient world as some ‘optimists’ have claimed, it was nevertheless fundamental enough to survive into the early middle ages, in both ecclesiastical and secular circles.³ Outside Egypt, the nature of the evidence is such

¹ This paper is based on the talk, ‘Lay Archives in Vandal North Africa: The *Tablettes Albertini*’ which I delivered at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds 2002. I would like to express my appreciation to Adam J. Kosto, who organized the panel, and to Warren Brown and Matthew Innes for much useful feedback. I would also like to offer my sincere thanks to Michael McCormick, whose expert comments and advice have immeasurably improved this chapter, and to Brian DeLay and Gregory A. Smith for their tireless generosity and many useful suggestions.

² Augustine, *Sermo*, 303.2: *Novimus enim aliquos negotiatores qui cum litteras non noverint, requirunt sibi mercenarios litteratos; et cum ipsi litteras nesciant, aliis scribentibus rationes suas ingentia lucra conquirunt*. For Augustine’s own ‘attempt to lay the theoretical foundations for a reading culture’ see B. Stock, *Augustine the Reader. Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), at p. 3. The study builds on Stock’s earlier work on literacy, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore, MD, 1990) and *The Implications of Literacy. Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ, 1983).

³ The literature on literacy is vast and constantly growing. For a good recent survey see N. Everett, ‘Literacy,’ in G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar (eds), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 543–44. Of particular relevance to the themes discussed in this paper are A. K. Bowman and G. Woolf (eds), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. C. M. Kelly, ‘Later Roman Bureaucracy: Going through the Files’, at pp. 161–76 and P. Heather, ‘Literacy and

that modern discussion of lay literacy in the late antique and early medieval period has tended to centre upon the late Roman bureaucracy, the more elite strata of society, and those living in large urban centres. But in a world where the vast majority of the population was neither wealthy nor urban, the invaluable insight these studies have provided into the nature and function of literacy among the governing classes must be complemented with a closer examination of literate practice in the late antique countryside.

This paper explores the question of rural literacy through the lens of the Albertini Tablets, a remarkable collection of documents produced by and for rural landholders in a small, remote farming community on the frontiers of Vandal North Africa toward the end of the fifth century. The tablets constitute one of our richest sources for the social history and rural economy of late antique North Africa.⁴ Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the Albertini Tablets also provide us a precious glimpse into the kinds of writing activity that took place in a rural community of late antique peasants and smallholders, allowing us to consider how widespread that activity was, as well as something of the social profile of the individuals who embraced (or at least employed) the written word. Moreover, an examination of the documents' physical features and the manner in which they were preserved can illuminate the function and importance of written documentation on the borderlands of late antique North Africa. These collective insights, in turn, raise important questions about the survival and transformation of late Roman documentary culture throughout the western Mediterranean on the cusp of the early Middle Ages; for if the Albertini Tablets were typical of the level of documentation that world produced, the written word had penetrated late Roman society to a profound degree.

THE DOCUMENTS

The Albertini Tablets (so called after their first editor, Eugène Albertini) are 45 wooden panels that make up a collection of 34 documents. Wooden writing tablets

Power in the Migration Period', at pp. 177–97; W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA, 1989); M. Beard et al. (eds), *Literacy in the Roman World*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Suppl. Ser., 3 (Ann Arbor, MI, 1991); R. D. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989), and the papers in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁴ In addition to the works cited below: J. Lambert, 'Les "Tablettes Albertini"', *Revue africaine*, 97 (1953), pp. 196–225; M. Pallasse, 'Les "Tablettes Albertini" intéressent-elles le colonat romain du Bas empire', *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, ser. 4, 33 (1955), pp. 267–81; J. Percival, 'Culturae Mancianae: Field Patterns in the Albertini Tablets', in B. Levick (ed.), *The Ancient Historian and his Materials. Essays in Honour of C. E. Stevens on his Seventieth Birthday* (Farnborough, 1975), pp. 213–27; C. R. Whittaker, 'Land and Labour in North Africa', *Klio Beiträge zur alten Geschichte. Akademie der Wissenschaften der DR Zentralinstitut für alte Geschichte und Archäologie* 2/60, 60 (1978), pp. 331–62; and H. Pavis d'Escurac, 'Irrigation et vie paysanne dans l'Afrique du Nord antique', *Ktèma*, 5 (1980), pp. 177–91.

were used throughout the ancient world, from Egypt to Britain, perhaps most famously at Vindolanda along Hadrian's Wall.⁵ Like the Vindolanda documents, the Albertini Tablets were discovered along the fringes of the Roman world. Unearthed in 1928 along the Tunisian–Algerian border, in the region of Djebel Mrata on what would have been the mountainous pre-desert frontier of the Vandal kingdom, the Albertini Tablets are preserved today in the Musée des Antiquités in Algiers. The Djebel Mrata panels are not the only such documents to survive from North Africa. Wooden tablets have also been found at an antique well at Bir Trough in Algeria, though to the best of my knowledge they remain unpublished.⁶ The Albertini Tablets, on the other hand, were the subject of an outstanding edition in 1952, complete with photographs as well as palaeographical, philological, legal, and historical analysis of the entire corpus.⁷

The surviving tablets represent a number of different kinds of documents, including the sale of a slave and that of an olive press, as well as a dowry and two tables of calculations.⁸ Most of the documents, however, are deeds (*instrumenta*) concerning the transfer of small plots of olive, fig, and nut trees. The transfers probably involved perpetual, hereditary cultivation rights to the land as well as access to the associated irrigation systems rather than the outright ownership (*dominium*) of the property, which remained the reserve of a local notable named Flavius Geminus Catullinus, *flamen perpetuus*.⁹ Where we can still read their

⁵ A. K. Bowman and J. D. Thomas, *Vindolanda: The Latin Writing-tablets*, Britannia Monograph, 4 (London, 1983) and *The Vindolanda writing-tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses II)* (London, 1994). On wooden writing tablets in general, see J. L. Sharpe, 'Wooden Books and the History of the Codex: Isocrates and the Farm Account, Evidence from the Egyptian Desert', in J. L. Sharpe (ed.), *Roger Powell, the compleat binder: liber amicorum*, Bibliologia, 14 (Turnhout, 1996), pp. 107–29 (thanks to Dorothy Africa for this reference). Wooden writing tablets were also used in seventh-century Ireland: cf. E. A. Lowe (ed.), *Codices Latini Antiquiores: A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts prior to the Ninth Century, Supplement* (Oxford, 1971), no. 1684.

⁶ J.-P. Bonnal and P.-A. Février, 'Ostraka de la région de Bir Trough', *Bulletin d'archéologie algérienne*, 2 (1966–67), pp. 239–49, at 239.

⁷ Courtois et al., *Tablettes Albertini* [hereafter *TA*].

⁸ Dowry: *TA*, act I. Slave: act II. Olive press: act XXXI. Tables of calculation: acts XXXIII and XXXIV.

⁹ D. J. Mattingly, 'Olive Cultivation and the Albertini Tablets', *L'Africa romana*, 6 (1989), pp. 403–15, at 405–6 and R. B. Hitchner, 'Historical Text and Archaeological Context in Roman North Africa: The Albertini Tablets and the Kasserine Survey', in D. B. Small (ed.), *Methods in the Mediterranean. Historical and Archaeological Views on Texts and Archaeology*, Mnemosyne suppl., 135 (Leiden, 1995), pp. 124–42, at 136. See however P. Ørsted, 'From Henchir Mettich to the Albertini Tablets. A Study in the Economic and Social Significance of the Roman Lease System (*locatio-conductio*)', in J. Carlsen, P. Ørsted and J. E. Skydsgaard (eds), *Landuse in the Roman Empire*, *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* suppl., 22 (Rome, 1994), pp. 115–25, at 122–23. On Fl. Geminus Catullinus, see Mattingly, 'Olive Cultivation', p. 404, n. 6, *contra* Courtois, 'Les hommes et les choses', in *TA*, pp. 189–211, at 197, n. 8. See also F. M. Clover, 'The Symbiosis of Romans and Vandals in Africa', in E. Chrysos and A. Schwarcz (eds), *Das Reich und die Barbaren, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichte* (Cologne/Vienna, 1989), repr. in his *The Late Roman West and the Vandals* (Aldershot, 1993), pp. 57–73, at 61.

opening lines, the tablets are dated according to the regnal year of the third Vandal king, Gunthamund (484–96). Insofar as it is possible to tell, all of the surviving acts belong to the period from 493 to 496 AD. In general, however, the tablets betray little sign of a Vandal presence; and indeed, the arid, marginal region where the documents were discovered (about 65km southwest of Thelepte) lies much further south than the coastal plain and agricultural highlands where the Vandals are typically thought to have settled.¹⁰

What the Albertini Tablets do reveal are ordinary property transactions between lay landholders in a rural community with its economic and social centre in a farm known as the Fundus Tuletianos;¹¹ even the two documents clearly drafted on other nearby *fundi* record sales where Geminus Felix, a ‘citizen’ of Tuletianos (*cibis tuletianensis*), was the purchaser.¹² Indeed, most of the surviving *instrumenta* record purchases by Geminus Felix and his brother, Geminus Cresconius.¹³ The dowry concerns another member of the Geminus family, Januarilla.¹⁴ What would therefore seem to be a family archive is, however, complicated by the fact that three of the surviving acts seem to have nothing to do with the Geminii as buyers, sellers, witnesses, scribes, or even neighbours.¹⁵ Of course, in the 490s these three documents may well have had some connection to the *gens Geminia* which is inaccessible to us today; but the whole collection may also simply be the dossier of the Fundus Tuletianos itself.¹⁶ In either case, the surviving acts certainly represent a collection of legal documents owned and preserved by a local landholder or landholders for their own use.

¹⁰ Notwithstanding the presence of a number of Germanic-sounding personal names in the tablets: Gudulus (TA, act XIII), Gibalus (act XV), Sigibalus (act XXI). On the names see M. Schönfeld, *Wörterbuch der altgermanischen Personen- und Völkernamen nach der Überlieferung des klassischen Altertums bearbeitet* (Heidelberg, 1911, repr. 1965), pp. 115, s.n. ‘Gudullus’, and 111 s.n. ‘Goda’; 110 s.n. ‘Gival’; and 206–7 s.n. ‘Sigisvultus’ respectively. The name Gudullus was already attested in Africa in the second century: *CIL* VIII.18068 (Lambaesis). On Vandal settlement in Africa see Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 218–20, G. G. Koenig, ‘Wandalische Grabfunde des 5. und 6. Jahrhunderts’, *Madridrer Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, 22 (1981), pp. 299–360 and Andreas Schwarcz in Chapter 2 of the present volume. Recent scholarship has tended to be skeptical of the value of archaeological evidence in determining barbarian settlement patterns in the late Roman world: see for example, P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 33–34 and Appendix 3.

¹¹ This farm was probably part of a domain quite similar to the settlement in the region of Thelepte described by R. B. Hitchner, ‘The Kasserine Archeological Survey – 1987’, *Ant. af.*, 26 (1990), pp. 231–60.

¹² TA, act IV (Fundus Magula) and act XXIX (Fundus Gemiones). cf. act II.

¹³ Geminus Felix: TA, acts II, IV, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVII, XIX, XX, XXII, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXXI, and XXXII; probably also act V. Geminus Cresconius: acts III, VI, VII, and VIII. Cresconius and Felix were both sons of Fortunus: act XV (Cresconius); acts II, III, XXIX and XXXI (Felix). cf. Courtois, ‘Les hommes et les choses’, p. 208 (tableau généalogique).

¹⁴ TA, act I. Geminia Januarilla’s father may have been Januarius, another son of Fortunus: act VI. cf. Courtois, ‘Les hommes et les choses’, p. 208 (tableau généalogique).

¹⁵ TA, acts XVI, XVIII, and XXVI.

¹⁶ Mattingly, ‘Olive Cultivation’, p. 404.

LITERACY

This cluster of documentation also reveals a community in which a substantial minority of the male population was able to write, at least on a basic level. The acts contained in the tablets allow us to see the writing activity of three main groups, which occasionally overlap: landholders who were selling off a slave, an olive press, or the cultivation rights to small plots of land; their neighbours and relatives upon whom they called to witness the sales; and the scribes who drew up the instruments that record the transactions. The first of these groups was primarily male; the second and third, exclusively so. The Tuletianos community does not easily lend itself to firm statistics, but taken as a whole, the three groups represent a relatively small number of individuals – perhaps 75 in all, or about half of the approximately 147 people that we see in the Albertini Tablets as a corpus. The remaining 72 were for the most part buyers and neighbours who were not called upon to sign the acts, and about whose ability to write we are therefore completely ignorant. Nor is it necessary that the original owner of these documents was himself literate: the Theadelphia papyri, for example, preserve the dossier of an illiterate Egyptian farmer and local notable active in the late third and early fourth centuries.¹⁷ In Vandal Africa, as in Roman Egypt, the possession of written instruments reveals something of the significance and extent of literacy in society, but does not necessarily signal the literacy of the owner.

The men who wrote the surviving acts do not appear to have been professional notaries or to have formed a specialized social group. Eight scribes identify themselves by name; through palaeographical analysis of the tablets Charles Perrat has identified a ninth, possibly even a tenth and an eleventh.¹⁸ Of the nine certain scribes, one was the local priest, Saturninus. Two others identify themselves as *magistri*, perhaps masters of some local school.¹⁹ It is difficult to imagine that a

¹⁷ G. M. Parássoglou (ed.), *The archive of Aurelius Sakaon. Papers of an Egyptian farmer in the last century of Theadelphia*, Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, 23 (Bonn, 1978), nos. 1, 39, 43–7, 49–51, 64, 66 and 72. However, a Cresconius, possibly Geminus Cresconius, witnessed one of the acts preserved in the Albertini Tablets: *TA*, act XIV.

¹⁸ C. Perrat, 'Etude paléographique', in *TA*, pp. 15–62, at 51–57. The eight named scribes: (1) Donatianus (*TA*, acts XI, XIII, XV, and XXVII; probably II, XXXI, and XXXII); (2) Lucianus *magister* (acts V, VI, VIII, IX, and XXV; probably XXI); (3) Montius (act III; probably VII); (4) Paul (act XXVI); (5) Pulcherius (act XII; probably XXII); (6) Quadratianus *magister* (acts X and XIV; probably XVIII, XIX, and XXIII); (7) Saturninus *presbyter* (act XXVIII); (8) Solacius (act XXX). In addition to these, on palaeographical grounds: (9) Paulinianus (probably acts XVI and XXIV). The 'uncertain' scribes are Fidentius (act XXIX? act XXXIII?), Julianus (act I?), and Quodvultdeus son of Gudulus (act I?). Seven documents cannot be attributed to a specific scribe: *TA*, acts I, IV, XVII, XX, XXIX, XXXIII, and XXXIV (Perrat, 'Etude paléographique', p. 56). On the *TA*, scribes in their late antique context, see N. Everett, 'Scribes and Charters in Lombard Italy', *Studi medievali*, ser. 3, 41 (2000), pp. 39–83, esp. 59–63.

¹⁹ On the use of the term *magister* in Vandal North Africa, see the appendix to this chapter. L. Dossey, 'Christians and Romans: aspiration, assimilation, and conflict in the North African countryside' (unpubl. PhD, Harvard University, 1998), pp. 114–15, concludes that the two *magistri* in the Albertini Tablets were rural magistrates, which is certainly also possible.

community as small as the Fundus Tuletianos appears to have been would have needed the services of two schoolteachers, but the two men may have served in successive years.²⁰ In any case, the majority of the scribes in the Albertini Tablets give us no indication of their rank or profession. They had nonetheless been well taught. Although their orthography and grammar are heavily influenced by the evolution of late vulgar Latin, all of the scribes wrote with a competent, practised and efficient cursive.²¹ That they were members of the Tuletianos community is indicated by the fact that most of them also served as witnesses to deeds which they themselves did not write up.²² Moreover, the scribe Donatianus owned at least one field in the region of Tuletianos, and sold a slave to Geminius Felix.²³ The scribe Paul, too, sold a plot of 30 olive and fig trees for which he wrote up his own *instrumentum*.²⁴

Thus, on the Fundus Tuletianos in the mid-490s we see a number of local landholders who could write up a legally valid instrument, quite possibly with the aid of a formulary of some sort, or simply by using earlier deeds as models.²⁵ As a corollary of the high number of scribes, the number of documents each redactor is known to have written is relatively low. The most prolific of the scribes was Donatianus, who drafted seven of the surviving instruments. The two *magistri* wrote up five and six documents each; another three scribes, two each.²⁶ The remaining three named scribes, including the priest Saturninus, drew up only a single instrument each. The Albertini Tablets reveal only a handful of men writing documents in this remote corner of Vandal Africa; but it is a significant handful, in a very short period of time.

²⁰ Lucianus was *magister* on 15 September 493 (*TA*, act VI) and on 12 January 494 (act IX); cf. acts V and XXV (undated). Also act VIII (19 November 493) where he does not claim the title. Lucianus does not appear in any dated acts after January 494. Quadratianus was *magister* on 6 March 494 (act X), but does not claim the title before that date: acts III (5 April 493 (?)), IV (13 January 494), VI (15 September 493), and IX (12 January 494); cf. act XXV (undated). Quadratianus also did not sign himself *magister* in 496: act XIV (18 February 496 (?)). For schoolteachers on the village level, see R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), pp. 106–7 and, for some illuminating examples from Roman Egypt, see K. Hopkins, ‘Conquest by Book’, in Beard et al., *Literacy in the Roman World*, pp. 133–58, at 152–5; but cf. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, pp. 306–12.

²¹ Perrat, ‘Etude paléographique’, pp. 22–51. On the language of the tablets, see L. Leschi, ‘La langue des tablettes’, in *TA*, pp. 63–80 and V. Väänänen, *Etude sur le texte et la langue des Tablettes Albertini*, Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemia Toimituksia, Sarja B, 141:2 (Helsinki, 1965), pp. 26–57.

²² Donatianus (act XVIII); Lucianus *magister* (act XXX); Paulinianus (acts III, IV, VI, VIII, X, and XXVIII); Quadratianus *magister* (acts III, IV, VI, IX, and XXV); Saturninus *presbyter* (acts XIV and XX); and Solacius (act XXVII). Of the uncertain scribes: Fidentius (acts V and XXXI; cf. act XXIX, which Fidentius may have drafted).

²³ *TA*, acts II (slave) and XXIV (field).

²⁴ *TA*, act XXVI.

²⁵ For the structure of the *instrumentum* used in the acts, see C. Saumagne, ‘Le Droit’, in *TA*, pp. 81–187, at 81–96, and Väänänen, *Etude*, pp. 17–25.

²⁶ See above, note 18.

Palaeographical considerations also suggest that both vendors and witnesses signed the Tuletianos documents with autograph formulas and *signa*, and we are therefore able to draw some tentative conclusions about the writing ability of both of these groups.²⁷ Of the two, only the vendors included both men and women. None of the women, however, was clearly able to write even her own name. Nine of the 14 female vendors (64 per cent) were explicitly said to be ‘ignorant of letters’ (*litteras nescint*), though as we shall see, even this admission may not be an unambiguous indication of their illiteracy.²⁸ Two more (14 per cent) only ever signed the relevant acts with their *signa*, though again this does not necessarily indicate that they were unable to write.²⁹ In the three remaining cases, we have no real information from which to judge the writing ability of these female vendors. The tablet bearing the signatures has been lost from one of the relevant acts; in the other two cases, husbands signed both for themselves and for their wives in transactions where they as a couple were the joint vendors.³⁰ On the other hand, of the 25 male landholders selling their slave, olive-press, and cultivation rights to

Table 10.1 Writing ability in the Albertini Tablets (1): Vendors

	Men	Women*
‘Ignorant of letters’	17 (68%)	9 (64%)
Signed with autograph formula	4 (16%)	–
Uncertain	3 (12%)	3 (21%)
Signed with <i>signum</i> (not explicitly ‘ignorant of letters’)	1 (4%)	2 (14%)
Total	25	14

* Percentages add to less than 100 per cent because of rounding.

²⁷ Perrat, ‘Etude paléographique’, pp. 57–58. For a similar study of Mt. Athos in the middle and late Byzantine periods, see N. Oikonomides, ‘Mount Athos: Levels of Literacy’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 42 (1988), pp. 167–78. Contrast the St-Gall region in the eighth century: McKitterick, *Carolingians*, p. 92; but also M. Richter, ‘*quisquis scit scribere, nullum potat abere labore.*’ Zur Laienschriftlichkeit im 8. Jahrhundert’, in J. Jarnut, U. Nonn and M. Richter (eds), *Karl Martell in seiner Zeit*, Beihefte der Francia, 37 (Sigmaringen, 1994), pp. 393–404.

²⁸ (1) Adeodata (*TA*, act XVIII; cf. act XI); (2) Coia (act III); (3) Donata (act XXXII); (4) Egyptia (act V); (5) Fotta (acts VII and XII); (6) Gilesa (act X); (7) Siddina, the wife of Processanus (acts XIII and XV; cf. act XXXI); (8) Siddina, the wife of Julius Victorianus (act XXIX); (9) Victorina (act XXVIII).

²⁹ (1) Donata (*TA*, act IV) and (2) Prejecta (act XXVII). cf. Oikonomides, ‘Mount Athos’, p. 169.

³⁰ Husbands sign: (1) Peregus (*TA*, act IX) and (2) Donatilla (acts VI and XXV). Loss of tablets: (3) Martianilla (act XXIII).

sold, received the entire price, and subscribed'.³⁷ Of these four vendors, two had also drawn up their own instruments; the other two (including Restitutus) were recognizably unaccustomed to using a pen.³⁸ For the three remaining male vendors (12 per cent) we have no information because of damage to, or loss of tablets.³⁹

Documents in the Tuletianos region also regularly listed the names of between two and five individuals (in addition to the scribe and the vendors) who served as witnesses to the acts.⁴⁰ They were invariably male. Among witnesses, we see almost an exact inversion of the patterns of writing activity that we see among male vendors. In this small, rural farming community, 24 of the 36 men who witnessed documents which they themselves did not draw up (67 per cent) could write at least their own name and a short formula expressing their presence at the sale: for example, 'I, Fidentius, was present at this *instrumentum*', or 'I, Cresconius, having seen the price, subscribed'.⁴¹ In at least a handful of cases, the witness's ability to write went beyond this basic level, and he signed as a proxy for neighbours or family members who could not do so themselves: 'I, Nobelianus, asked by Magarius because he is ignorant of letters, am making his *signum*'.⁴² In stark contrast to the state of affairs among vendors, only seven witnesses were said to be

³⁷ (1) Restitutus (*TA*, act IV: *ego restitutus bendidi hominem pretium accepi et suscripsi*). Also (2) Donatianus (act II, with Perrat, 'Etude paléographique', pp. 51–2); (3) Muraena (act XXVIII); and (4) Paul (act XXVI).

³⁸ Donatianus and Paul wrote up their own acts: Perrat, 'Etude paléographique', pp. 51–3; act XXVI. Restitutus and Muraena did not often write: Perrat, 'Etude paléographique', p. 58, with *TA*, pl. 8 (tablet 8a) and 44 (tablet 41a).

³⁹ (1) Geminius Valentius (*TA*, act XXIII); (2) Julius Iambus (act XXI); (3) Saturninus (act II).

⁴⁰ Two witnesses: *TA*, acts XI and XIII. Five: acts III, V, VI, and XXV.

⁴¹ (1) Fidentius (*TA*, act V: *ego fidentius ad hunc instrumentu inter[fui]*; also act XXXI; cf. act XXIX, which Fidentius may have written up) and (2) Cresconius (act XIV: *ego cresconius biso pretium suscrissi*). Also (3) Catullinus (act XXVII); (4) Donatianus (act XVIII); (5) Donatus (act V); (6) Fortunatianus (act III); (7) Geminius Urbanianus (acts XIV and XXIX); (8) Habetdeus (act XXVI); (9) Innulus (act VIII); (10) Lucianus *magister* (act XXX); (11) Muraena (acts IV and XI); (12) Nobelianus (act XII); (13) Paulinianus (acts III, IV, VI, VIII, X and XXVIII); (14) Quadratianus *magister* (acts III, IV, VI, IX, and XXV); (15) Quodvultdeus (act V); (16) Restitutus (act V); (17) Saturninus *presbyter* (acts XIV and XX); (18) Saturninus son of Benenatus (act XXVI); (19) Saturninus (act XII), perhaps the same as an earlier Saturninus; (20) Secundianus (act VII); (21) Solacius (act XXVII); (22) Urbanianus (acts X and XXVIII), perhaps the same as Geminius Urbanianus (above); (23) Valentinianus (act XXVI); (24) Victorinus (acts VI, IX, XXV, and XXVIII).

⁴² *TA*, act XXII: *ego nobelianus petitus a magariu eo quod literas nescit singnum sum facit sinnum X magari*. Also Catullinus (act XXVII); Donatus (act V); Fidentius (acts XXIX, XXXI); Lucianus *magister* (act XXX); Nobelianus (act XII); Restitutus (act V); Saturninus *presbyter* (acts XIV, XX); Victorinus (acts IX, XXV). A document's scribe also regularly served this function, especially for unlettered vendors: Donatianus (acts XI, XIII, XV, and XXXII), Lucianus *magister* (acts V, VI, IX, and XXV), Montius (acts III and VII), Quadratianus *magister* (act X), and Solacius (act XXX).

unlettered (19 per cent).⁴³ One of these, of course, was Magarius; another was Quintus, the father of the scribe Paulinianus, who invariably also witnessed for himself whenever he signed for his father.⁴⁴ Four more witnesses signed with their *signa* without being explicitly unlettered (11 per cent),⁴⁵ while, like Quintus, a fifth (3 per cent) only ever witnessed deeds through his son, the scribe Quadratianus *magister*.⁴⁶ Though Quadratianus' father never placed his own hand to any of the surviving documents, no comment is ever made about his ability to write, and so he too remains something of an ambiguous case.

Table 10.2 Writing ability in the Albertini Tablets (2): Witnesses

	Men	Women
Signed with autograph formula	24 (67%)	—
'Ignorant of letters'	7 (19%)	—
Signed with <i>signum</i> (not explicitly 'ignorant of letters')	4 (11%)	—
Signed through a proxy (only)	1 (3%)	—
Total	36	—

The striking contrast between the abilities (or willingness) of vendors and witnesses to sign a short formula suggests that members of the community who could write and felt comfortable doing so were more likely to be asked to witness documents than individuals who could not. Other considerations seem to lead to the same conclusion. In the surviving tablets, witnesses typically guaranteed anywhere between one and four acts each, though on average they were present for two.⁴⁷ Only four individuals witnessed more than four documents. Two of these were the scribes Quadratianus *magister* (who witnessed five acts) and Paulinianus (who witnessed six).⁴⁸ The other two were their fathers, Januarius and Quintus respectively, who as we have seen, always secured the presence of their sons as witnesses to the transactions. The fact that in the surviving acts Paulinianus only

⁴³ (1) Iambus (*TA*, act XXX); (2) Magarius (acts IX, XII, XV, and XXV); (3) Quintianus (act VIII); (4) Quintus (acts III, IV, VI, X and XXVIII); (5) Quodvultdeus (act XXX); (6) Secundianus son of Iader (act XXX); and (7) Victor (act V).

⁴⁴ *TA*, acts III, IV, VI, X and XXVIII, of which the clearest example is act III: *ego paulinianus ad iussione pa[tris] mei quinti qui literas nescit tam pro me quam pro eum suscripsi*.

⁴⁵ (1) Donatianus (*TA*, acts XV, XXV, and XXVII); (2) Martialis (act XXX); (3) Saturninus son of Egyptus (acts XI and XIII); (4) Victorianus (act XXVII).

⁴⁶ Januarius (*TA*, acts III, IV, VI, IX, and XXV; cf. acts X and XIV).

⁴⁷ For the data, see above notes 41, 43, 45 and 46.

⁴⁸ Quadratianus *magister*: *TA*, acts III, IV, VI, IX and XXV; Paulinianus: acts III, IV, VI, VIII, X and XXVIII (not including documents they also wrote).

be more or less likely to sell off pieces of their land. In absolute terms, 16 is a fairly low percentage, and would imply an overall literacy rate of under five per cent if those who claimed to be 'ignorant of letters' and the various elements of the population for whose writing ability we have no positive evidence (women, non-landholders, slaves) were in fact generally illiterate. Nevertheless, for a community of peasant cultivators – however prosperous – living in a marginal region on the pre-desert fringes of the late Roman West, even a literacy rate of five per cent seems remarkably high. All the more so when we consider that at least nine local, probably affluent, landholders could also write well enough to draw up a legally valid instrument. Members of the community who could write and read seem to have been particularly sought out to witness these instruments. We also see instances of writing that do not fit easily into the categories of scribe, vendor, or witness discussed above. Julianus seems to have signed in his own hand the act investing his fiancée, Geminia Januarilla, with her dowry.⁵³ In act XXVI, the buyers were (uniquely) called upon to sign the instrument, and an autograph formula, presumably written by the husband, guarantees the act on behalf of 'Valsamius the buyer and [his] wife Maxi'.⁵⁴ On the unused external face of another instrument, an unidentified scribe made a tally of some of the purchases within the Tuletianos community.⁵⁵ Altogether, the impression this leaves is that written documentation of property ownership continued to be important on the pre-desert borderlands of the Vandal kingdom down into the 490s and probably beyond.

PHYSICAL FEATURES AND PRESERVATION

The practical, everyday concerns of these late antique landholders dictated an equally practical approach to documentation. This is seen both in the physical features of the Albertini Tablets and in the way they were preserved, and, indeed, it extended even to the landholders' choice of writing materials. Though relatively inexpensive in Antiquity, a roll of papyrus still typically cost the equivalent of an average labourer's wages for several days.⁵⁶ We do not know how prevalent papyrus was in the region of the Djebel Mrata in late Antiquity, though in general the material seems to have been scarce outside cities and towns, even in Egypt.⁵⁷ A network of roads connected the Fundus Tuletianos to its neighbouring towns and *fundi*, but the remoteness of the region and the costs of importing the material may

⁵³ *TA*, act I. Perrat, 'Etude paléographique', p. 55.

⁵⁴ *TA*, act XXVI: *ualsamius emtor et maxi iugalis*.

⁵⁵ *TA*, act XXXIII. The same scribe may perhaps have written act XXIX: Perrat, 'Etude paléographique', p. 57.

⁵⁶ N. Lewis, *Papyrus in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 129–34 and T. C. Skeat, 'The Length of the Standard Papyrus Roll and the Cost-Advantage of the Codex', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 45 (1982), pp. 169–75. cf. N. Lewis, *Papyrus in Classical Antiquity: A Supplement*, *Papyrologica Bruxellensia*, 23 (Brussels, 1989), pp. 40–41.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Papyrus*, p. 91, n. 8.

well have made papyrus prohibitively expensive.⁵⁸ Wooden writing tablets, which were widely used in Antiquity, may therefore have presented a more economical alternative.⁵⁹

Given the right tools and the presence of a skilled carpenter, such tablets could be manufactured locally, as in the Dakhleh Oasis in Egypt and along Hadrian's Wall in Britain.⁶⁰ However, the wood from which the Albertini Tablets were made did not originate in the region where they were discovered. The documents were mainly written on thin cedar slabs, with a handful written on maple, almond, willow or poplar – woods which, for the most part, had to be imported into the Tuletianos region from the forests of the Aurès Mountains in modern-day Algeria.⁶¹ We know that writing tablets were an object of trade in the ancient world, but even so the wooden fragments that comprise the Tuletianos dossier may not have been purchased as finished codices.⁶² The dimensions of a theoretical average tablet from this collection would be 174 × 72 mm, but in practice the tablets do not seem to have been cut to a standard size. Instead, they range between 111 and 260 mm in length, and between 41 and 104 mm in width.⁶³ Individual tablets could even be irregular in their shape and thickness.⁶⁴ In most cases an effort does seem to have been made to ensure that the separate leaves of a diptych or triptych had roughly the same

⁵⁸ Road to the Fundus Magula: *TA*, acts III, IX, and XVIII. Road from Buresa: acts III and XII. Road from Lismul: act XXI. Road from Camellos (or a camel track? *uia de camellos*): act XXI.

⁵⁹ On other responses to these problems, see the paper by Jacqueline Godfrey in Chapter 9 of the present volume.

⁶⁰ C. A. Hope, 'The Find Context of the Kellis Agricultural Account Book', in R. S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book* (*P. Kell. IV Gr. 96*), Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph, 7. Oxbow Monograph, 92 (Oxford, 1997), pp. 5–14, at 9–11; J. L. Sharpe, 'Codicology', in Bagnall, *Kellis Agricultural Account Book*, pp. 17–20 and 'The Dakhleh Tablets and Some Codicological Considerations', in E. Lalou (ed.), *Les tablettes à écrire de l'antiquité à l'époque moderne* (Turnhout, 1992), pp. 127–48, at 135–6; Bowman and Thomas, *Vindolanda: The Latin Writing-tablets*, pp. 29–31.

⁶¹ M. L. Saccardy, conservateur des Eaux et Forêts, chef du Service de la Conservation des Sols au G.G. de l'Algérie in a note to the editors of the *TA* quoted by Courtois, 'Les documents', in *TA*, pp. 3–14, at p. 8, n. 1. The climate of the Maghrib does not seem to have changed radically from the fifth century: see for example, P. Morizot, 'L'Aurès et l'olivier', *Ant. af.*, 29 (1993), pp. 177–240.

⁶² Tablets as objects of trade: M. Crawford and J. Reynolds, 'The Aezani Copy of the Prices Edict', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 26 (1977), pp. 125–51, at 145, and *CIL* VI.9841 (Rome); Bowman and Thomas, *Vindolanda: The Latin Writing-Tablets*, p. 29.

⁶³ Mean length = 174 mm with a standard deviation of 38 mm (sample size = 44, discounting damaged *TA*, tablet 11); mean width = 72 mm with a standard deviation of 14 mm (sample size = 37, discounting broken tablets 9, 10, 13, 16, 19, 28, and 44–5, all of which are missing fragments). In cases where an individual tablet is irregular in its length or width, the mean of the tablet's extreme measurements was used in these calculations. When tablets broken along the grain of the wood could be reassembled into a complete whole, the width used in these calculations was the sum of the widths of the individual fragments (see, for example, note 65 below).

⁶⁴ Shape: esp. *TA*, tablets 3, 5, 31, and 36; less so tablet 34. Thickness: tablets 1, 24, 29–30, 36–8, and 43–4.

were also sales of small plots of land under olive and fig cultivation. Just as in the acts on the extant faces, this land was under the *dominium* of Fl. Geminius Catullinus, and its transfer involved members of the Tuletianos community as vendors, neighbours, witnesses and scribes. Perhaps most significantly, Geminius Felix, the principal buyer in the extant deeds, also purchased all three plots whose sale was recorded in the legible overwritten documents.⁷¹ Insofar as it is possible to tell, much the same seems to have been true of the acts where today only a word or two can still be read. Geminius Cresconius and his wife Cresconia appear to have been selling something in one or perhaps two of these cases; in another, Felix was once again probably the buyer.⁷²

Why the tablets were reused so rapidly is something of a mystery. The holders of the older acts may simply have sold off their land, however recently purchased, thus rendering the documents obsolete. The sales may have been registered with some public authority, with the same result. Or perhaps the short life-span some documents enjoyed in the Tuletianos community was connected to the agrarian law under which these fields were cultivated (the *lex Manciana*), which stipulated that small-farmers working *culturae manciatae* would lose their claims to the land two years after they ceased actively to cultivate it.⁷³ In any case, the age of the document does not seem to have been the sole determining factor. The oldest of the still-legible overwritten documents, act XVII, was initially written up some seven months after the oldest document preserved in the Tuletianos dossier. Indeed, as many as four of the extant acts appear to be older than act XVII, while only three of the extant acts are demonstrably more recent than the last of the legible overwritten texts.⁷⁴

kal(endas) ianuarias (15 December 495). cf. tablet 37b: act XXIV dates to: *anno dodecimo dom(i)n(i) regis ginttamundi sub [die] xi k(a)l(endas) maias* (21 April 496). This tablet was reused twice. The second of the two previous acts is dated only to 'the sixth year', *anno sexto*, presumably – though not certainly – of Gunthamund. Also tablet 34b, which shows traces of two previous acts, one apparently from the sixth and the other seemingly from the seventh year, presumably of the reign of Gunthamund. Act XXI, the deed on the extant face, dates to the tenth year of Gunthamund's reign. That the original acts on these tablets probably dated to the reign of Gunthamund as well is suggested by the references to this king on tablets where little or nothing else is legible through the palimpsest: tablet 1a: *guntabundi*; tablet 3a: *anno [...] domini regis guntabundi*.

⁷¹ *TA*, acts XIII, XVII, and XX.

⁷² Cresconius and Cresconia: *TA*, tablet 1a and tablet 18a, where the position of the names near the beginning of the act suggests that they were sellers, not buyers. Felix: tablet 38a.

⁷³ *CIL* VIII.25902 (Henchir Mettich), 4.9–22; repr. in D. P. Kehoe, *The Economics of Agriculture on Roman Imperial Estates in North Africa* (Gottingen, 1988), at p. 32, with discussion at p. 39. Thirteen of the acts (*TA*, acts IV, IX–XIV, XVII, XIX, XX, XXII–XXIV; cf. act XXV) involve *culturae manciatae*, on which see esp. Kehoe, *Economics of agriculture*, pp. 28–70 and J. Kolendo, *Le colonat en Afrique sous le Haut-Empire*. 2nd edn (Paris, 1991), esp. pp. 34–43. See also Mattingly, 'Olive Cultivation', pp. 412–14.

⁷⁴ *TA*, act XVII dates to 17 October 493. Older: acts XVI (13 March 493), III (5 April 493 (?)), VI (15 September 493), and I (17 September 493 (?)). Overwritten act XIII dates to 16 November 494. More recent: acts XXIII (15 December 495), XIV (18 February 496), and XXIV (21 (?) April 496).

Whatever the reason for the tablets' reuse, the documents produced in this community were intended to be consulted. Sixteen of the acts have notes on their outer faces for easy reference, identifying the *instrumenta* with respect both to the seller's name and to the location of the fields being transferred; less often with respect to only one or the other of these data.⁷⁵ These notes made it possible to identify the act from its essential information without having to go to the trouble of opening it up. They seem to have been added after the two or three tablets that comprised a complete act were strapped together.⁷⁶ Moreover, Charles Perrat was of the opinion that these dorsal notations were, for the most part, written by the same hand – not the hand of the document's scribe – but on different days and with different pens.⁷⁷ This suggests that the quick references may have been noted down by the document's owner or one of his subordinates, which in turn would seem to be indicative of at least a degree of sophistication in the organization of the archive that preserved the instruments.⁷⁸

The notations, however, do not follow a rigorous formula, and, in general, leave the impression that they included whatever seemed unusual enough about a sale to distinguish it from the pre-existing acts. The location of agricultural property was an important memory-aid, and only two of the extant notes to acts involving the sale of a field seem to omit any reference to that field's placement, however vague.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, when trees in more than one location were conveyed in a single sale, the dorsal notes read simply 'various places' (*dibersa loca*),⁸⁰ while when more than one seller was involved in an act, the name of at least the principal vendor was typically noted down for quick reference.⁸¹ This may suggest that a property's former owner was the most important element in its conceptualization. Then again, sales involving more than one vendor were quite common, while sales involving fields in more than one location were not, and may have been more memorable for that very reason. Similarly, note would occasionally be made of the kind of property conveyed in an instrument, particularly if that property was not land. We see this in the references to the slave Fortinus and to Processanus' olive press; though we also find mention of fields and olive trees, both of which were frequently the subjects of

⁷⁵ *TA*, acts III, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XII, XVI, XXI, and XXVII. Location only: acts IV and XVI. Owner only: act XXV; cf. act XI. Similarly acts II (the slave Fortinus) and XXXI (olive press). cf. acts XXIII and XXIV (both fragmentary); also tablet 1b, which perhaps contains traces of the *instrumentum* for the dowry. Perrat, 'Etude paléographique', p. 61.

⁷⁶ Courtois, 'Les documents', p. 11.

⁷⁷ Perrat, 'Etude paléographique', pp. 61–2.

⁷⁸ cf. J. P. Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London, 1997), pp. 47–50; also R. Sharpe, 'Accession, Classification, Location: Shelfmarks in Medieval Libraries', *Scriptorium*, 50 (1996), pp. 279–87, at 281.

⁷⁹ Certainly *TA*, act XXV; also act IV, despite the fact that *aumas* appears to have been both a toponym and a kind of field in the Djebel Mrata region (cf. act XIX). For place as a mnemonic device in the Roman world, see Small, *Wax Tablets*, pp. 95–116.

⁸⁰ *TA*, acts III and VII; the notation from act XXIV is illegible.

⁸¹ *TA*, acts II, III, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XXV, and XXXI. Act XXI mentions both Iambus and his daughter-in-law Siddina.

To be sure, by the standards of the late Roman and early medieval elite, the land and goods mentioned in the Djebel Mrata documents were not enormously valuable. The average sale of land on the Fundus Tuletianos seems to have involved about 282 *folles*, while the total value of the goods for which prices survive would have been between 45 and 50 gold *solidi*, including the dowry, slave, and 17 parcels of land.⁸⁸ For comparison, the sixth-century Ravenna papyri mention 11 sales ranging in value from 5 to 133 *solidi*.⁸⁹ Over the period separating the last of the Italian sales from those recorded in the Albertini Tablets, the value of the *solidus* (expressed in terms both of the average labourer's monthly wages and of the median price of wheat) seems to have remained more or less stable.⁹⁰ In contrast to the near-contemporary material from Ostrogothic and Byzantine Italy, then, the individual sales recorded in the Albertini Tablets would appear to have been quite modest, at least in monetary terms. In real terms, however, they represented a significant amount of wealth: 178 olive trees, 61 fig trees, four almond trees and two pistachio trees, an olive press, a slave worth at least 65 olive trees, and a dowry worth another 750 or more.⁹¹ For comparison, D. J. Mattingly notes that 'the vast majority of modern Tunisian peasant families specialising in olive cultivation has owned between only 20 and 100 olive trees.'⁹² This was certainly enough property to make it worthwhile protecting the documents that assured its owner's legal title.

If this interpretation is correct, it further reflects the practical approach to writing that pervades the Albertini Tablets. Nothing within these tablets suggests that in the

⁸⁸ At Grierson's estimate of 350–400 *folles* to the *solidus*: P. Grierson, 'The *Tablettes Albertini* and the Value of the *Solidus* in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries A.D.', *JRS*, 49 (1959), pp. 73–80, at 74–75. Land: *TA*, acts III, IV, VII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXIII, XXV (a total of 3 *solidi*, 3,460 *folles*; not counting acts V and VI, whose prices have been restored by the editors). Slave: act II (1 *solidus*, 700 *folles*). Dowry: act I (12 000 *folles*). Grand total: 4 *solidi*, 4,160 *folles*. On average, the sales recorded in the *TA* seem to have involved about 16 trees (max. = 37 trees [act VI]; min. = 1 tree [act XIX]), most of which were olive trees.

⁸⁹ Tjäder, *Nichtliterarischen Papyri*, vol. 2, p. 11, with reference to PP. 35 (5 *solidi*), Marini 118 (133 *solidi*), and 29–33, 35–37, 42, and 46. The price in a twelfth sale, P. 38–41, does not survive. The average value of the land involved in the seventh-century Lombard charters was between 20 and 50 *solidi*: Everett, 'Scribes and Charters', p. 60, n. 71. Here the comparison is more difficult to make, however, in part because of the complicated metrology of the Lombard pseudo-imperial coinage. See W. A. Oddy, 'Analyses of Lombardic Tremisses by the Specific-Gravity Method', *Numismatic chronicle*, Ser. 7, 12 (1972), pp. 193–215, esp. 195.

⁹⁰ C. Morrisson, 'Monnaie et prix à Byzance du Ve au VIIe siècle', in C. Abadie-Reynal, V. Kavor, J. Lefort and C. Morrison (eds), *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantine*, Réalités byzantines, 1 (Paris, 1989), pp. 239–60, at 257–8. Thereafter the fineness of provincial gold from Byzantine Italy began to drop, making comparison more difficult: W. A. Oddy, 'The Debasement of the Provincial Byzantine Gold Coinage from the Seventh to Ninth Centuries', in W. Hahn and W. E. Metcalf (eds), *Studies in Early Byzantine Gold Coinage*, Numismatic Studies, 17 (New York, 1988), pp. 135–42, at 141–2.

⁹¹ In the Tuletianos community, olive trees normally sold for about 15–16 *folles* each: Grierson, '*Tablettes Albertini*', p. 74. The slave Fortinus was sold for 1 *solidus*, 700 *folles* (*TA*, act II); Januarilla's dowry was valued at 12 000 *folles* (act I). See also above, note 88.

⁹² Mattingly, 'Olive Cultivation', p. 407, n. 19.

emerge to prominence under the Byzantine regime of the sixth century.⁹⁵ Indeed, in the fifth and sixth centuries we see a remarkable number of African teachers and doctors, a handful of lay correspondents of African churchmen, the survival of a professional notariate in Carthage, and the continued – though admittedly less widespread – commissioning of Latin funerary inscriptions in Christian churches, which may also imply a literate audience.⁹⁶ The level of literacy that we see in the Tuletianos community, as revealed in the Albertini Tablets, seems to fit this pattern as well.

But extrapolating from the Albertini Tablets to lay documentary practice in general, even in late antique North Africa, is admittedly a tricky business.⁹⁷ Unlike a number of the Ravenna papyri, the Albertini Tablets show no signs of ever having been registered in the civic archives or *gesta municipalia*.⁹⁸ Indeed there is no real evidence for – or for that matter against – the survival of public archives in Vandal North Africa. Such archives had certainly continued to function in Ostrogothic Italy and early Merovingian Gaul.⁹⁹ Augustine, writing in Hippo Regius just decades before the Vandal conquest of Africa, could refer without irony to both public and ecclesiastical archives.¹⁰⁰ If anything, the African Church was becoming ever more bureaucratic in the age of Augustine: in 402, a council of bishops decided that Numidia should keep duplicate registers and archives, one of which was to be housed

⁹⁵ P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West. From the Sixth through Eighth Centuries*, tr. J. J. Contreni (Columbia, SC, 1976), pp. 37–39 and H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, 7th edn (Paris, 1971), pp. 492–3; K. Vössing, *Schule und Bildung im Nordafrika der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Brussels, 1997), pp. 624–31 takes a darker view of the Vandal period.

⁹⁶ On which see my 'Staying Roman in Late Antique North Africa: Vandals, Moors, and Byzantines, c. 400–c. 700' (unpubl. PhD, Harvard University, in progress), Chapter 4, 'The Old Ruling Class under the Vandals.'

⁹⁷ The standard studies on late Roman legal culture and private documentation are H. Steinacker, *Die antiken Grundlagen der frühmittelalterlichen Privaturkunde* (Leipzig, 1927); Classen, 'Fortleben und Wandel', and P. Classen, *Kaiserreskript und Königsurkunde. Diplomatische Studien zum Problem der Kontinuität zwischen Altertum und Mittelalter*, *Vyzantina Keimena kai Meletai*, 15 (Thessaloniki, 1977); Levy, *West Roman Vulgar Law*; and M. Kaser, *Das römische Privatrecht*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (Munich, 1971–75), translated into English by R. Dannenbring as *Roman Private Law* (Pretoria, 1984).

⁹⁸ Tjäder, *Nichtliterarischen Papyri*, PP. 4–5, 7–8, 10–12, 14–15, 21, 29, 31, and 33. On the public registration of documents, see Steinacker, *Antiken Grundlagen*, pp. 76–7.

⁹⁹ The standard work is still B. Hirschfeld, *Die Gesta Municipalia in römischer und frühgermanischer Zeit* (Marburg, 1904); see also Classen, *Kaiserreskript und Königsurkunde*, pp. 107–37; I. N. Wood, 'Disputes in Late Fifth- and Sixth-century Gaul: Some Problems', in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds), *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 7–22, at 12–14; and I. N. Wood, 'Administration, Law and Culture in Merovingian Gaul', in McKitterick, *Uses of Literacy*, pp. 63–81, at 65. cf. Kelly, 'Later Roman Bureaucracy', and Posner, *Archives*, pp. 217–21; see, however, Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, pp. 289–94.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *Ep.*, 43.9.25 and Augustine, *Epistula ad Catholicos de secta Donatistarum (De unitate Ecclesiae)*, M. Petschenig (ed.), CSEL, 52 (Vienna, 1909), 12.31. For the late Roman period in general, see C. Lepelley, *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire*, 2 vols (Paris, 1979–81), esp. vol. 1, pp. 223–8.

sums mentioned in the table, and at least 23 per cent of the 31 surviving documents of sale. Of course, a number of the remaining entries on this list of purchases may be references to deeds that survive only in part; but it seems safe to suppose that a large number of transactions in the Tuletianos community were recorded in written instruments about which we know nothing.

As for the rest of the western Mediterranean, even after the schools of the grammarians and rhetors disappeared from Italy, Gaul, and Spain (probably at some point in the sixth century), the elements of a written education continued to be available on at least a restricted basis. Just how restricted remains an open question, but it is clear that at least some laymen learned to read and write well into the early medieval period.¹¹¹ Written substantiation of property claims also continued to be important to the legal world of late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The Italian papyri indicate that a corps of legal clerks survived in Ravenna into the seventh century at least, where they were instrumental in drafting a good deal of the practical documentation preserved in that city's archiepiscopal archive. The same seems to have been true both for Ravenna's port at Classe and for Rome, though in neither of these cases does the evidence extend beyond the late sixth century or so.¹¹² The Lombard charters, the charters and formularies from Merovingian Gaul, and the slate documents from Visigothic Spain all leave us with the impression that lay proprietors throughout the late Roman and early medieval West participated in a culture of property management that relied on everyday written instruments to record the rightful possession of land and other valuable property.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Riché, *Education and Culture*, *passim* with summary at pp. 495–6; see also Wood, 'Administration and Culture', esp. pp. 66–7 and 73–4; T. F. X. Noble, 'Literacy and the Papal Government in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', in McKitterick, *Uses of Literacy*, pp. 82–108, at 103–4; R. Collins, 'Literacy and the Laity in Early Mediaeval Spain', in McKitterick, *Uses of Literacy*, pp. 109–33, at 114–16; and Heather, 'Literacy and Power', esp. pp. 187–92. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, pp. 312–22 makes the case for a meaningful decline in literacy in late Antiquity.

¹¹² Tjäder, *Nichtliterarischen Papyri*, esp. PP. 8, 14–15, 16, 20, and 56 (*tabelliones*), and PP. 4–5, 6, 13, 22, 29, 31, 35, and 36 (*forenses*). cf. Rome: PP. 17 and 18–19 (*tabelliones*); Classe: P. 37 (*tabellio*), and PP. 4–5 and 34 (*forensis*). See also Everett, 'Scribes and Charters', pp. 55–9.

¹¹³ Everett, 'Scribes and Charters', p. 62; Wood, 'Administration and Culture', p. 63; Collins, 'Literacy in early mediaeval Spain', p. 118; Paul Fouracre, 'Placita' and the Settlement of Disputes in Later Merovingian Francia', in Davies and Fouracre, *Settlement of Disputes*, pp. 23–43, esp. 25–6; P. J. Geary, 'Land, language and memory in Europe, 700–1100', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, ser. 6, 9 (1999), pp. 169–84. Lombard charters: L. Schiaparelli (ed.), *Codice diplomatico longobardo*, Fonti per la storia d'Italia, 62–3 (Rome, 1929, 1933). Merovingian formularies: see above, note 87; also B. Bischoff, *Salzburger Formelbücher und Briefe aus Tassilonischer und Karolingischer Zeit* (Munich, 1973). Merovingian and early Carolingian lay documents: A. Bruckner and R. Marichal (eds), *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores: Facsimile Edition of the Latin Charters Prior to the Ninth Century* (Olten, 1954–), esp. nos 569 (testament, second half of the seventh century), 592 (testament, sixth/seventh century), 609 (sale, AD 769), and 676 (gift, AD 762). Visigothic slate: I. Velázquez Soriano, *Las pizarras visigodas: edición crítica y estudio*, Antigüedad y cristianismo: Monografías históricas sobre la Antigüedad tardía, 6 (Murcia,

of the wealthier elements of the late antique peasantry could write, read, and use documents to record their practical legal affairs even beyond Africa, and beyond the late fifth century.

persons.¹⁰ The regular use of the term *magister* to mean ‘teacher’ in Vandal Africa may thus suggest that Lucianus and Quadratianus were schoolmasters.¹¹

¹⁰ Caelestinus I: Fulgentius, *Ep.*, 16.27; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Fulgentius, *Ad Monimum*, J. Fraipont (ed.), CCSL, 91 (Turnhout, 1968), 1.1.5, 1.4.1–2, and 1.18.4; *Ep.*, 6.6 and 14.43; *De ueritate praedestinationis*, J. Fraipont (ed.), CCSL, 91 (Turnhout, 1968), 1.45 and *Sermo*, 1.2 (a quotation from John 13:13). And cf. Dracontius, *De Laud.*, 3.231 and Ferrandus, *Ep.*, 5.6.

¹¹ The epigraphic evidence is not much help in resolving the question, but see *AE* (1953), no. 49 (Mactar, 4th–6th century) and perhaps *CIL* VIII.21551 (Mechera-Sfa, 408 AD). For *magistri militum* and (probably) a *magister fundi* in the Byzantine period, see D. Pringle, *The Defense of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab Conquest*, BAR International Series, 99 (Oxford, 1981), nos 31 (Aïn el-Ksar; with discussion at pp. 76–7), 48 (Rusguniae), 51 (Sufetula), and 53 (Sufetula).

Chapter 11

Who Were the Circumcellions?

Brent D. Shaw

The division of the Christian Church in North Africa into two antagonistic factions in the reign of the first Christian Emperor Constantine led to a prolonged conflict that polarized not just the leadership of bishops and priests, but also diverse and substantial numbers of ordinary believers. On the one side stood the Catholic Church, with its close ties to the imperial state. On the other were the dissident Christians or so-called 'Donatists'. The dissenters, however, saw themselves as perfectly orthodox Christians who represented the 'True Church' in Africa, and claimed that they were just as 'Catholic' as their adversaries. The pejorative label of 'Donatist' was pasted onto them by their sectarian enemies who sought thereby to reduce them to nothing more than a personal heretical following of the Bishop Donatus of Carthage. It is critical for the modern historian to remember that the dissident Christians in Africa completely rejected the name of 'Donatist' and that they considered themselves to be the 'true' and 'orthodox' Christian Church in Africa. In the context of this conflict between the two hostile Christian communities, Catholic bishops writing between the 360s and the 420s describe the violent actions of anti-Catholic gangs of men and women who are portrayed as wandering through the rural regions and villages of Africa. These violent persons are consistently referred to in the Catholic sources by the pejorative word *circumcelliones* (the singular *circumellio* occurs, but rarely).¹ The precise meaning of the word has been much debated and will be significant to the investigation that I propose to undertake here. The derogatory name, having a strong connotation of something like 'the vagrants,' was used as a label to designate these men and women by their Catholic enemies. Perhaps unfortunately, it has also become the

¹ The modern scholarly literature on the question is massive. Since this chapter is restricted to an investigation of a specific aspect of the problem, only those items that are directly relevant to it will be cited. 'Missing items' should not be construed as an ignorance on the author's part of their existence. The main works that represent the 'peasant revolt' tradition in modern scholarship are those of Hans-Joachim Diesner and W. H. C. Frend. The principal references for both scholars are as follows: H.-J. Diesner, 'Spätantike Widerstandsbewegungen: Das Circumcellionentum', *Aus der Byzantinistischen Arbeit der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, 1 (Berlin, 1957), pp. 106–12; 'Methodisches und Sachliches zum Circumcellionentum (I)', *WZM*, 8 (1959), pp. 1009–16, repr. in his *Kirche und Staat im spätrömischen Reich. Aufsätze zur Spätantike und zur Geschichte der Alten Kirche* (Berlin, 1964), pp. 53–66; 'Methodisches und Sachliches zum Circumcellionentum (II)', *WZM*, 9 (1960), pp. 183–9, repr. in his *Kirche und Staat*, pp. 66–77; 'Die Circumcellionen von Hippo

modern academic *terminus technicus* for violent entrepreneurs amongst the dissidents, although it is well known that when these latter persons designated themselves they preferred more probative names, such as *agonistici* or competitors who 'struggled' or 'contested' in sectarian battles on behalf of the true faith and the true Church.

The standard and perhaps the most widely accepted interpretation of who the *circumcelliones* were has been offered by W. H. C. Frend within the context of his historical studies of the Donatist Church and, more generally, of Christianity in its North African context. In producing the following general picture or synoptic model of the circumcellions and their behaviour, I have therefore used his work as a benchmark of modern studies. I have drawn not only on his classic work 'The Donatist Church', but also on numerous other research papers relevant to the subject that he has published over the past four decades. Synoptic treatments of the circumcellions by Frend, and others, represent them as a social body, so consistent and cohesive in their identity and behaviour that they can be considered 'a movement' of sorts, even 'a social movement.'² According to this standard interpretation, *circumcelliones* were gangs of young men who tended to dwell or to 'hang out' around (*circum*) martyr shrines (*cellae*), a practice from which they acquired their name, as well as the source of their basic sustenance (from granaries that were built into such shrines).³ As a kind of monkish ascetics, the circumcellions made their way from one martyr's shrine to the next through the North African countryside, a habit that accounted in part for the perception of them as vagrants or

Regius', *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 85 (1960), pp. 497–508, repr. in his *Kirche und Staat*, pp. 78–90; 'Volk und Volksaufstände bei Optatus von Mileve', *WZM*, 10 (1962), pp. 63–5 repr. in his *Kirche und Staat*, pp. 17–21; 'Die Periodisierung des Circumcellionismus', *WZM*, 10 (1962), pp. 1329–38; Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford, 1952); 'The *Cellae* of the African Circumcellions', *JThS*, 3 (1952), pp. 87–9; 'Circumcellions and Monks', *JThS*, 20 (1969), pp. 542–9, repr. in his *Town and Country in the Early Christian Centuries* (London, 1980); 'The Monks and the Survival of the East Roman Empire in the Fifth Century', *Past & Present*, 54 (1972), pp. 3–24, repr. in his *Religion, Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries* (London, 1976); 'Heresy and Schism as Social and National Movements', in D. Baker (ed.), *Studies in Church History*, vol. 9 (Cambridge, 1972), repr. in his *Religion, Popular and Unpopular*, pp. 37–56; 'Town and Countryside in Early Christianity', in D. Baker (ed.), *Studies in Church History*, 16 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 25–42, repr. in his *Town and Country*; 'Liberty and Unity', *The Peter Ainslie Memorial Lecture* (Rhodes University, 1965), pp. 5–19 repr. in his *Religion, Popular and Unpopular*; 'The Donatist Church – Forty Years On', in C. Landman and D. P. Whitelaw (eds), *Windows on Origins: Essays on the Early Church in Honour of J.A.A.A. Stoop*. (Pretoria, 1985), pp. 70–84, repr. in his *Archaeology and History in the Study of Early Christianity* (London, 1988); P. G. G. M. Schulten, *De Circumcellionen: een sociaal-religieuze Beweging in de Late Oudheid* (Scheveningen, 1984), offers a general survey of all the literature to the mid-1980s.

² Frend, 'The Donatist Church – Forty Years On', p. 70; 'Town and Countryside', p. 27. He states that they had much in common, for example, with the Montanists of the Tembris Valley in Anatolia. See Frend, 'The Donatist Church – Forty Years On', p. 70.

³ W. H. C. Frend, 'A Note on Religion and Life in a Numidian Village in the Later Roman Empire', *BCTH*, 17B (1982), pp. 261–71, repr. in his *Archaeology and History*, p. 266.

wanderers with no fixed homes.⁴ Although perhaps not monks 'in any orthodox sense', they nevertheless 'combined the lives of the wandering ascetic with a fierce lust for martyrdom and hatred of social injustice'.⁵ They were particularly associated with a peculiar form of martyrdom: a propensity to commit suicide, to take their own lives by drowning themselves, by self-immolation or by throwing themselves off great heights. The Christian funerary stones at the base of the Djebel Nif en Nsir in south-central Algeria, for example, have been proffered as evidence of their lethal cult activity of hurling themselves to their deaths from cliffs.⁶ The principal defining characteristic of the circumcellions, however, and the one that appears most frequently in our surviving sources, was that they engaged in collective violent gang-like assaults on their sectarian enemies. These attacks were directed against Catholic clergy and against members of the wealthy landowning class who were especially identified with the cause of the Catholic Church in North Africa.⁷ The circumcellions are therefore portrayed as religious 'extremists,' a desperate 'fringe' or a 'violent wing' of the Donatist Church.⁸

It is also commonly argued that the circumcellions were not just a violent fanatics who fought for the dissident Church. They are also consistently viewed as the leading-edge of social and economic protest in late Roman Africa. In this, Frend agrees with the (East) German scholar Hans-Joachim Diesner: 'Diesner ... rightly saw the phenomenon of the Circumcellions as a symptom of deep economic and social malaise in late-Roman Africa, and he indicated clearly that their sporadic violent insurrections against the landowners, authorities and Catholic clergy

⁴ Frend, 'A Note on Religion and Life', p. 266; 'The Monophysites and the Transition between the Ancient World and the Middle Ages', *Atti dei Convegni Lincei*, 45: *Convegno Internazionale 'Passaggio dal mondo antico al Medio Evo da Teodosio a San Gregorio Magno'* (Rome, 1980), repr. in his *Archaeology and History*, at p. 346; *The Donatist Church*, pp. 172–6; 'Town and Countryside', p. 27; 'The Ecology of the early Christianities', in G. Irvine (ed.), *Christianity in its Social Context*. SPCK Theological Collections, 8 (London, 1967), repr. in his *Town and Country*, at pp. 25–6.

⁵ W. H. C. Frend, 'The Church of the Roman Empire, 313–600', in Stephen Neill and Hans-Ruedi Weber (eds), *The Layman in Christian History* (London, 1963), pp. 57–87, repr. in his *Town and Country*, at p. 80; *The Donatist Church*, pp. 171–5; 'The Monks and the Survival', pp. 9, 14–15. As monks: see also the views of S. Calderone, 'Circumcellions', *Parola del Passato*, 22 (1967), pp. 94–109.

⁶ W. H. C. Frend, 'The North African Cult of Martyrs', in *Jenseitsvorstellungen in Antike und Christentum: Gedenkschrift für Alfred Stuiber*. Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband, 9 (Münster, 1982), repr. in his *Archaeology and History*, at p. 162. Djebel Nif en Nsir is about 20km. south of 'Aïn Mlila; it is a questionable claim that has been rejected by Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae: le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IV^e au VII^e siècle* (Paris–Rome, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 488–9.

⁷ A position also taken by J.-P. Brisson, 'Les circoncellions', chapter 4.1 of his *Autonomisme et christianisme dans l'Afrique romaine de Septime-Sévère à l'invasion vandale* (Paris, 1958), pp. 325–410; and E. Tengström, 'Die Circumcellionen', chapter 1 of his *Donatisten und Katholiken. Soziale, wirtschaftliche und politische Aspekte einer nordafrikanischen Kirchenanspaltung* (Göteborg, 1964), pp. 24–78.

⁸ Frend, 'The Ecology of the Early Christianities', pp. 25–6.

contributed to the sudden downfall of Roman authority in North Africa.⁹ Frend and many others, including the Israeli scholar Ze'ev Rubin, have compared the 'circumcellion movement' to other provincial movements of popular revolution, in particular the Bagaudae of late Roman Gaul.¹⁰ Indeed, Frend and other scholars, like Diesner, go so far as to see the circumcellions as representing a type of local ethnic or 'nationalistic' uprising against Roman authority.¹¹ Frend also echoes the contention of Büttner (and others) that the circumcellion movement represented a kind of peasant revolt moved by religious sentiment, a millenarian movement that struggled for a 'world turned upside down'. In doing so, Frend makes explicit comparisons with 'the Peasants Revolt of 1381, the Czech Adamites and the German Peasants' Revolt, or even the Cornish Rising of 1549' as 'only the more striking examples' of the continuum of the social phenomenon to which they belonged.¹² He also asserts, in company with many other scholars, that the circumcellions had their greatest concentration of numbers and the core of their social and political strength in the deep hinterland regions of Numidia. Despite

⁹ Frend, 'The Donatist Church – Forty Years On', pp. 75–6; for the construction of the circumcellions as a type of primitive peasant rebellion: F. Martroye, 'Une tentative de révolution sociale en Afrique: Donatistes et circoncellions', *Revue des questions historiques*, 38/76 (1904), pp. 353–416; 'Une tentative de révolution sociale en Afrique: Donatistes et circoncellions', *Revue des questions historiques*, 39/77 (1905), pp. 5–53; B. Baldwin, 'Peasant Revolt in Africa in the Late Roman Empire', *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies*, 6 (1961), pp. 3–11. Russian scholarship, naturally, pursued this line of interpretation: N. A. Mashkîn, 'Agonistici, ili circumcellioni v kodeske Theodosiana', *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii*, 4 (1938), pp. 88–92 (A title which translates as 'Agonistici, or circumcelliones in the Codex Theodosianus'); and 'Le mouvement révolutionnaire des esclaves et des colons dans l'Afrique romain', *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii*, 30.4 (1949), pp. 51–61 (in Russian); A. D. Dmitrev, 'Sur le problème des agonistici et des circumcelliones', *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii*, 25.3 (1948), pp. 66–78 (in Russian).

¹⁰ Frend, 'The Monophysites and the Transition', pp. 342–3; 'Circumcellions and Monks', p. 9: tied to the emergence of a new landowning class; though with the caveat that the Bagaudae, unlike the circumcellions, were not Christians 'Circumcellions and Monks', p. 19; 'The Monks and the Survival', p. 9: 'circumcellions and Bagaudae, both of which aimed at the destruction of the existing social order.' See Z. Rubin, 'Mass Movements in Late Antiquity – Appearances and Realities (b) The Circumcellions', in I. Malkin and Z. W. Rubinson (eds), *Leaders and Masses in the Roman World: Studies in Honor of Zvi Yavetz* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 129–87, at pp. 156–79, for a similar interpretation, argued in detail.

¹¹ W. H. C. Frend, 'Nationalism as a Factor in Anti-Chalcedonian Feeling in Egypt', in S. Mews (ed.), *Religion and National Identity. Studies in Church History*, 18 (Oxford, 1982), repr. in his *Archaeology and History*, at p. 22.

¹² Frend, 'The Ecology of the Early Christianities', p. 14; 'Popular Religion and Christological Controversy in the Fifth Century', in G. J. Cuning and D. Baker (eds), *Studies in Church History*, 8 (Cambridge, 1971), repr. in his *Religion, Popular and Unpopular*, at p. 20; T. Büttner, 'Die Sozial-Religiöse Bewegung der Circumcellionen (Agonisten), in Nordafrika', in *Vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit. Festschrift Heinrich Sproemberg* (Berlin, 1956), pp. 388–96; and 'Die Circumcellionen: eine sozial-religiöse Bewegung', in T. Büttner & E. Werner (eds), *Circumcellionen und Adamiten. Zwei Formen mittelalterlicher Haeresie*, *Forschungen zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte*, no. 2 (Berlin, 1959), pp. 1–72.

scholarly disagreements over the precise meaning of their name, or the exact recruitment base of their membership, this general picture encapsulates what has become the dictionary definition of circumcellions.¹³

The point of my inquiry is to initiate a process of questioning every one of these standard claims about the circumcellions. The essence of the modern problematic of identifying the circumcellions and their activities has been constructed in two basic modes. The first is the *a priori* application to them of a model of 'peasant rebellion' or a 'movement of rural social protest.' In this mode, the existing evidence is made to fit the conception of them as 'primitive rebels' of a Hobsbawmian type. The second, and in some ways the more insidious, method is the propensity to apply all the available data on circumcellions to produce a general picture of the 'movement' – a pervasive tendency in which the biased nature of the data is never fully or rigorously interrogated and in which the historical context of the production of the data themselves is not carefully considered. It is the second of these problems that is my specific concern in this essay. This uncritical marshalling of all possible evidence to resolve the problem has understandable psychological roots. In their overwhelming desire for data, historians of the circumcellion question have grasped at whatever evidence is available. Since the sum total of the data is slight, historians have tended to cobble together all statements about circumcellions as if they are of more or less equal value.¹⁴ The propensity is not unknown in many other comparable historical investigations, especially in those where the evidence is sparse. This foray into the nature of the evidence is but one of a series of empirical inquiries that must precede the application of concepts of peasant rebellions or social movements to the phenomenon. The results, I promise, will be entirely negative.

Because of the aspects of bias and incomprehension that bedevil this particular historical problem, it is especially necessary to begin with a typology of the existing data. If the distribution of the literary evidence on the circumcellions is carefully considered, it is at once apparent that there is an almost palpable distinction

¹³ Amongst others, see: J. P. Byrne, 'Circumcellions', in J. P. Rodriguez (ed.), *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA–Oxford, 1997), p. 157; J. Ferron, 'Circumcellions d'Afrique', in A. Baudrillart (ed.), *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclesiastiques*, 12 (Paris, 1953), pp. 837–9; A. D. Fitzgerald, 'Circumcellions', in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI–Cambridge, 1999), pp. 193–4; A. Julicher, 'Circumcelliones', *RE*, 3.2 (1899), p. 2570; S. Lancel, 'Circoncillions', C.70 in *Encyclopédie Berbère*, 13 (1994), pp. 1962–4; C. Lepelley, 'Circumcelliones', in Cornelius Mayer (ed.), *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 1.5–6 (Basel, 1992), pp. 930–936; F. Martroye, 'Circoncillions', in F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq (eds.), *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, 3.2 (Paris, 1914), pp. 1692–1710; the brief resumé by Frend in his history of the Christian Church offers the same recapitulation of 'facts' that is being contested here: 'The Circumcellions,' in his *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA, 1984), pp. 572–4.

¹⁴ Characteristic, for example, is the use of 'Praedestinatus,' Cassiodorus, Isidore, and Tyconius by Tengström in his influential analysis of the circumcellions: *Donatisten und Katholiken*, pp. 38–41, 56, 58, 60, and so on.

document of this second age.¹⁶ It is this later or second tradition that produced extensive 'hit lists' of heresies that provides the important context for understanding outsiders' knowledge of, and writings about, circumcellions. The lists were meant to provide quick 'identity profiles' by which interested believers could recognize any one of the variegated host of enemies that the orthodox faced. It is important to understand that it is to this specific ideological and textual context to which almost all of our texts about circumcellions from sources outside Africa belong. The statements in them belong by category to a type of knowledge interest that is alien to debates within the African Christian community. They were connected instead to the dominant eastern and northern Mediterranean ecclesiastical and political power struggles of the time.

The earliest of the external sources is a work written by Filastrius, the Catholic bishop of Brixia (Brescia) in northern Italy. The precise dates of Filastrius' tenure as bishop, and consequently the date of his principal work in which the first non-African notice concerning the circumcellions is found, are not precisely known. Recent research favours dating his episcopate to the decade of the 380s, and the publication of his *Diversarum Hereseon Liber* ('Book of Different Heresies') to its last years, therefore about 389–90.¹⁷ Filastrius, a stern and stodgy local churchman, was seated at Brescia, part of a cluster of bishoprics in northern Italy that were implicated in networks of information centred on Ambrose's imperial seat at Milan. The most logical channel of communication by which Filastrius would have acquired some knowledge of what was happening in Africa would have been through the circles of informants around Ambrose, including those with African connections. This much can be inferred from a letter of Augustine's about 'this Filastrius, a certain bishop of Brixia, whom I myself saw when I was with the holy Ambrose at Mediolanum.'¹⁸ This chance remark suggests that Filastrius was at least an occasional visitor at Milan through the mid-380s when he would have had the opportunity to hear about happenings in Africa from men such as Alypius, Evodius and Augustine.¹⁹ It is clear, however, that what information filtered through to Filastrius consisted of simple outlines of only the most salient characteristics of 'the opposition' – rough caricatures that can also be seen in the literature of accusation and blame that was part of a hostile

¹⁶ One of these has become attached the writings of Tertullian, although it manifestly belongs to this later age. Usually referred to as the *Adversus omnes haereses*, it is a discursive discussion of 32 heresies. In our standard texts, it is usually appended to the *De praescriptione haereticorum*; for the text see F. Oehler (ed.), *Corpus Haereseologicum, I: scriptores haeresologicos minores latinos* (Berlin, 1856), pp. 271–9. See J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2 (Westminster, MD., 1992), p. 272 for some theories on its origins; it might be a Greek work translated into Latin by Victorinus of Pettau at the beginning of the fourth century, cf. Quasten, *Patrology*, p. 412.

¹⁷ *PCBE* 2, pp. 817–19: 'Filaster,' (also known as 'Felaster,' but I have used the standard 'Filastrius'). Pietri and Pietri set his death at some time after 387 but before 397; they date the *Diversarum haereseon liber* to before 391.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Ep.*, 222.2.

¹⁹ An evocative and precise description can be found in Peter Brown, 'Ambrose', chapter 8 in his *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London, 1967), pp. 79–87.

sectarian discourse within Africa itself. When these salient characteristics, often not much above the level of crude labelling, came into the hands of Filastrius, and were further refined by him, the caricature of the circumcellions that resulted was odd indeed. First, they are identified by an unusual name. Filastrius calls them 'circulators' (*circuitores*) rather than *circumcelliones*. And the description itself succinctly identifies the circumcellions as a wandering death sect whose members were hell-bent on self-destruction in the name of martyrdom:

There are others [sc. other heretics] in Africa who are the so-called *circuitores*. These men wander about the land and they compel those persons whom they encounter on the road to kill them, declaring that they desire to suffer martyrdom. Under this pretext many of them live their lives as bandits up to the time of their death. Some of them, however, die as *biothanati* [those who have suffered a violent death] by throwing themselves off heights, or by suffering some different type of death. Those who hurry, without any rational cause, to die in this way are willing to accept the condemnation that an honest death reflects on their own. Indeed, rather than releasing themselves from the coming judgement of God, they are in fact condemning themselves to it.²⁰

The general picture that an outside reader, unacquainted with the reality of the circumcellions in Africa, would derive from this description would be that of a bizarre and somewhat irrational suicide cult. Part of this construction depends on a categorization of these people as *biothanati*, which was not at all an African understanding of the nature of these deaths, but which belonged to an external, ultimately Greek and eastern, typology of deaths.²¹ The basic facts that Filastrius wishes to impart to his reader are that these 'circulators' are madmen who wander aimlessly around the African countryside, so intent on suffering the deaths of martyrs that they are willing to compel unfortunate wayfarers whom they encounter to kill them.

It is also important to note that Filastrius has a rather unfocussed picture of the social and religious context of the circumcellions. As heresy number 85 on his list they are separated from number 83, a collection of Montenses, Donatiani and Parmeniani, by an intervening heresy (number 84) that concerns various sects of *abstinentes* found in the Gauls, Spains, and in Aquitania who are likened to Gnostics and Manichees. Not only is the link between the so-called *circuitores* and

²⁰ Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber*, F. Heylen (ed.), CCSL, 9 (Turnhout, 1957), 85.57: *Alii sunt in Africa circuitores qui ita dicuntur. Hi circumeunt terram et quos inveniunt in via cogunt eos ut interficiantur ab illis, dicentes se desiderare pati martyrium, et sub causa hac multi latrocinantur interdum. Quidam autem ex his veluti biothanati moriuntur sese dantes ad praecipitium diversumque subeunt calamitatis interitum. Qui cum sine causa perire ita properant, honestae mortis sustinent detrimenta et iudicio dei futuro se potius implicant quam solvunt.*

²¹ On *biothanati*, a Latin term derived from the Greek *biothanatoi* (and a collateral form *biaiothanatoi*), see S. I. Johnston, 'The Unavenged: Dealing with Those who Die Violently', Chapter 4 of *The Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), pp. 127–60.

‘the Donatists’ thereby weakened, but his understanding of ‘the Donatists’ is itself revealing in its lack of precision. Although Filastrius wishes to label the dissident Christians in Africa as heretics, his image of them does not conform to any African norms. First of all, instead of highlighting Africa as its homeland, Filastrius seems best informed about a small branch of ‘Donatists’ that had emerged in the city of Rome who were labelled the *Montenses* or Mountaineers.²² It is these Mountaineers whom Filastrius makes the focus of the heresy. Only after identifying them does he list the heretics whom he labels the *Donatiani*, but he then adds: ‘who are now called the *Parmeniani* after a certain Parmenian who only *recently* became heir to their errors and falsity’.²³ Parmenian had in fact become bishop of Carthage in the early 360s, well over a quarter of a century before Filastrius penned these words. Therefore, as far as our first external source is concerned, we can conclude that it lacks ‘heretical precision’ when compared with the sharper picture that will soon emerge in the Latin West outside Africa.

The next external source on the circumcellions is a work that was known to, and quoted by, Augustine. It is another heresy list, but one that represents an elaboration of the primitive efforts of Filastrius. When precisely it was written cannot be determined. Its anonymous author copied portions of the works of Jerome, so he has come to be known as ‘pseudo-Jerome.’ All that we can say is that the work, conventionally known as the *Indiculus de haeresibus*, is definitely post-Hieronymian. It could have been composed as early as the mid-390s or, possibly, as late as 420.²⁴ Having mentioned the *Donatiani* as his 32nd heresy, the author proceeds to list other heresies that are closely allied to them, including the circumcellions (heresy number 33) and the Mountaineers (heresy number 35).

²² Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber*, 83: *Alii sunt Montenses, qui rebaptizant si quos seduxerint homines, et supra baptismum ecclesiae catholicae alium suum baptismum insaniunt promittentes . . .*

²³ Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber*, 83: . . . *qui et Donatiani dicuntur a quodam Donato in Africa constituto, qui hanc haeresim seminavit: qui et Parmeniani nunc appellantur a Parmeniano quodam, qui eorum nuper successit erroribus atque falsitati.* The reference to the fact that Parmenianus ‘recently’ (*nuper*) headed this faction would seem to date Filastrius’ written sources to the 360s or 370s. In that case, suspicion falls on an edition of Optatus. Since the pseudo-Jerome specifically refers to Optatus (see below), our suspicion is heightened that he is the source on which these later writers are depending.

²⁴ See G. Bardy, ‘L’*Indiculus de haeresibus* du pseudo-Jérôme’, *Recherches de science religieuse*, 19 (1929), pp. 385–405, for some of the problems. I accept Bardy’s argument that would date the piece to the period between 393 (since the author copies items from Jerome’s *De viris illustribus*) and 428, when Augustine refers to and quotes from the work in c. 81 of his *Liber de Haeresibus*. It is also important to note that the text is usually preserved with the works by Isidore for the reason (I accept) that Isidore was using it as one of his sources. De Labriolle advanced a different thesis that would interpret the relationship between the author and Isidore inversely, and which would therefore date this tract to some time *after* Isidore – P. de Labriolle, *Les sources de l’histoire du montanisme* (Fribourg–Paris, 1913), pp. cxxxii–cxxxiv. The matter is too detailed to be debated here. Although other connections are theoretically possible, I accept that Augustine’s reference to an anonymous work that contained the precise wording of the *Indiculus* is probably from this work and not a precursor to it.

Thirty-third (heresy). Circumcellions, whom they call Gotispitai [or, Cotipitae?], share the teachings of the above-mentioned heresy. These deranged men follow the path of their own madness, which is well known to everyone. Because they love the name martyr and because they desire human praise more than divine charity, they kill themselves. After they have uttered a prayer, they commit suicide by throwing themselves off a height, or by self-immolation, or by the sword – that is, by asking other persons to kill them. They do this so that by violently departing from this life they will acquire the name of martyrs.²⁵

Here the name of the *circumcelliones* is fixed exactly and accurately in an external source for the first time and it is closely linked to what has already become a stereotypical picture of them. Fundamentally it is that of a suicide cult whose members are driven by a desire for martyrdom. It is now specified that its members commit suicide by the sword or by fire in addition to self-precipitation. Typical words indicating madness or deranged behaviour that will appear consistently in the later labelling of these persons – such as *insania* and *dementia* – are added to the brief description for the first time. Perhaps more important is the fact that the definition of the circumcellions as a heresy now assumes its classic structural form. In the *Indiculus*, the circumcellions follow directly after the definition of the heresy of ‘the Donatists’ (still called *Donatiani*) who are not only given priority in the definition but who are also defined in terms that would be recognized by the disputants in Africa itself. The circumcellions are then attached as a sub-species of the heresy of the *Donatiani*. The Montenses, on the other hand, are now seen as peripheral to the African location of the Donatists and circumcellions. They are listed individually and are separated from the Donatists and the circumcellions by the intervening heresy of the Novatians (number 34). As heresies who shared similar viewpoints, whose geographical locus was the city of Rome, they are grouped with the followers of Novatian.

This same external tradition is also very much present in a work from the pen of Augustine, but which can only be said to be authored by him in a complex sense of authorship. This was Augustine’s own *Liber de haeresibus* (‘Book of Heresies’). The case is a caution against the easy categorization of sources as ‘internal’ or ‘external’ in my typology. In general, Augustine’s writings on circumcellion

²⁵ *Indiculus de haeresibus*, 45, in Oehler, *Corpus Haereseologicum*, vol. 1, pp. 295–6: *Trigesima tertia. Circumcelliones, quos Gotispitas vocant, huius supradictae haeresis habent doctrinam. Suam, quae omnibus nota est, in dementia sequuntur insani. Nam amore nominis martyrii et laudis humanae magis [quam] caritatis Christi cupidi semetipsos, interdum oratione facta, aut praecipitio, aut incendio, aut alios ad sui necem invitantes, gladio perimunt, quo violenter ex hac vita discedentes martyres nominentur.* and cf. PL, 81 (Paris, 1850), col. 643. On the surface of it, Francesco Arevalo’s text, copied by Migne, ought to be the better one, since represents a collation of more manuscripts. But I take Claude Ménard’s text of 1617, reprinted in Oehler, to be the better text. He clearly saw the critical word *Gotispitas* (which he might well have misread from *Cotipitas*) which makes sense of the Latin. Arevalo purposefully omitted the phrase in which it occurs – probably on the grounds that he thought that it was an odd term of which he could make no sense – leaving, however, a manifest lack of proper syntax in the truncated Latin sentence that remained after the omission.

Augustine to provide him with a handbook on heresies for the instruction of priests and laity.²⁸ Augustine tried to fob off Quodvultdeus by pointing out that such handbooks, written by Epiphanius and Filastrius, already existed. Augustine suggested that Quodvultdeus should simply arrange to have the Greek text of Epiphanius' book on heresies translated at Carthage. It is only in the aftermath of Quodvultdeus' repeated protestations about the difficulty that he would have in translating a text out of the Greek, and yet more insistent importunings that only the bishop of Hippo could undertake the project, that Augustine grudgingly relented, primarily, one suspects, to get the Carthaginian pest off his back. But Augustine agreed to do this only after he had finished other more important and urgent refutations of the Pelagian works of Julian. He promised Quodvultdeus that he would undertake the work on heresies in combination with the writing of his *Retractationes*. The reply provides a date of late 428 or 429 for the completion of the work.

It is important for our argument that the text of this work is not 'authored' by Augustine in the precise sense that he composed the whole work afresh *de novo*. The *Book of Heresies* is, rather, a turgid list that lacks the verve and genius of the author, and which betrays on every page that it is not much more than a re-canned work quickly put together from other existing sources. It is, in fact, not much more than a lightly edited pastiche of two existing works: for its first 57 chapters it is a distillation of an abbreviated Greek version of Epiphanius' *Panarion* known as the *Anacephaleôsis* (the 'Recapitulation'). The source of the 23 additional heresies that constitute the core of the second half of the work is a more severely edited version of Filastrius' *Liber de Haeresibus*. Finally, to complete the work, Augustine added eight more heresies drawn from various sources including Eusebius, the pseudo-Jerome, and his own experience. Although he added a few supernumerary heresies to update heretical movements to that of the Pelagians, his particular *bête-noire* of the time, it is clear that he otherwise used the structure that Filastrius and the *Indiculus* had provided for the placing and description of the Donatists and the circumcellions.

The place that the circumcellions have in this peculiar work of Augustine's therefore more properly belongs to the image of them already configured by the external tradition. Augustine's intimate knowledge of what was happening in Africa, however, permits him to expand and to correct some of the basics of the framework provided by Filastrius and the writer of the *Indiculus*. First of all the entry for the *Donatiani* or *Donatistae* – the latter and more appropriate term appears here for the first time in the heresy list tradition – is a reasonably detailed account of the origins of the dissident Church in Africa. Augustine then gives very short shrift to the so-called Mountaineers in Rome. As for the circumcellions, he adds some features that will be picked up in the later tradition. And then there is the Sallustian

²⁸ The badgering correspondence can be found as Augustine, *Ep.*, 221–4, and also prefaced to the CCSL edition of the work itself at pp. 273–81.

language: the fact that the circumcellions were a *genus hominum agreste* is striking and will have a real impact on the subsequent tradition. The primitive and lawless nature of the circumcellions is linked to the violence that they commit against others as well as against themselves. Augustine also adds the critical fact that there were many dissident Christians in Africa who disassociated themselves from the violent actions of the circumcellions. This is another new item in the description that will be adopted by subsequent writers, but that will also be misunderstood by them. The phrase with which he completes the entry, in which he condemns the 'Donatists' for blaming the rest of the Christian world outside Africa for their own faults was an old favourite of his, frequently used by him in sectarian combat within Africa.²⁹ Finally, and significantly, Augustine deletes all reference to martyrdom in the motivations of the circumcellions. The reasons are starkly and grossly political, but were not properly understood by outsiders and would therefore largely be ignored in the later development of the external tradition. Martyrdom was already so deeply embedded in the outsiders' caricature of the circumcellions that it could not be rooted out, even by an Augustine.

The treatment of the circumcellions by Augustine is structurally complex in terms of tradition in that it is simultaneously 'internal' and 'external.' By accepting, however grudgingly, the crude confines of the genre of the heresy list, Augustine worked within the listing tradition, at the same time confirming some parts of the picture and also contributing new elements to it. Amongst the existing elements that receive elaboration is the claim that the circumcellions deliberately provoked others to kill them.³⁰ The observation that some 'Donatists' did not consider themselves to be polluted or defiled by the activities of such men, is a line of Augustine's that was already decades old by this time.³¹ Since his additional remarks were made in the context of an externally produced genre, they were more easily adopted by outsiders who could understand them precisely because of the mode in which they were cast. As we shall see, however, only certain elements of the Augustinian additions will be selected to contribute to the picture that was being created by the external tradition. Only as long as the new parts of the picture were coherent with the external caricature were they easily adaptable and therefore useful. In this respect, Augustine will be exploited in ways that he himself probably would not have

²⁹ Phrase of Augustine's: found repeatedly in earlier works: Augustine, *Ep.*, 185.17 (c. 417 AD): 'charging the whole world with the defilement of some evildoers' – where it is already part of the canonical broadsheet against the 'Donatists', here repeated again, in great detail, to educate the imperial official Bonifatius.

³⁰ Augustine, *Ep.*, 185.12 gives one of the most elaborate of descriptions of this sort of behaviour more than a decade before the redaction of his *de Haeresibus*, although, notably, he does *not* identify such 'young men' as *circumcelliones* and clearly give a quite different context for their violence (in the context of anti-pagan actions).

³¹ For example, Augustine, *Ep.*, 139 (412 AD) to Marcellinus in discussing the grounds for the punishment of circumcellions because of the crimes they have committed, outlines some of the usual outrages and then states 'but there are some who claim they are not defiled by these crimes'.

imagined to provide new materials for further elaborations of the idea of the circumcellion.

But the principal early foyer of the creating of the external image of the circumcellion was Italy. There are good reasons to target centres not only in the north around Milan, but also in Campania in the southern parts of the peninsula. It is to this region and to the immediate post-Augustinian age that the next source that concerns the circumcellions belongs. It is yet another compilation that has strong links with the genre of the heresy list to which the above-mentioned works belong. Ascribed by Jacques Sirmond to a 'Praedestinatus,' the work was probably composed by a Pelagian anti-Augustinian writer (and so it has sometimes been attributed to Julian of Aeclanum). Whoever the actual author was, the work seems to have been composed in the decade after Augustine completed his *Liber de haeresibus*, in the mid- to late 430s. The treatise was redacted in three books, the first of which adheres strictly to the heresy list tradition. In order to demonstrate the orthodoxy of his own beliefs, the author defines 90 different heresies, the last of which is a rather blatant pro-Pelagian and not-too-covert attack on 'predestinarians', as the author conceived Augustine to be. The 69th heresy is that of the Donatists: *in sexagesimam et nonam haeresem donatistae a Donato exorti sunt*. Later in the same section as the Donatist heretics, the author lists the *circumcelliones* as if they were a subspecies of the Donatist heresy:

These heretics [that is, Donatists] who live in Italy are called the Mountaineers. In the interior of Africa they are called Parmenians and at Carthage, Donatists. In the two Numidias there are men who live like monks whom we call circumcellions, rough and most audacious slaves of demons who not only vent terrible savageries on others, but also who do not spare themselves any suffering. For they are accustomed to committing suicide by different kinds of death, but especially by throwing themselves off heights, as well as by water and by fire. And they seduce as many persons of either sex as they are able to this same kind of death. Sometimes they ask persons whom they encounter to kill them, threatening them with death if they do not do this. It is true, however, that such things are disapproved of by many Donatists, but they only express their displeasure in words, not by any actions. For if they really disapproved of them, they would not have communion with such men – these same people who throughout the churches of the whole world are happy to condemn the crime of just one man: Caecilianus.³²

A number of conclusions can be made about this writer and his account of the circumcellions. First of all, he draws on earlier, pre-Augustinian sources for the idea

³² 'Praedestinatus', *Liber de haeresibus*, 69, in Oehler, *Corpus Haereseologicum*, vol. 1, pp. 255–6: *Hi haeretici in partibus Italiae Montenses appellantur, in interiore Africa Parmeniani, in Carthaginensi Donatistae. In utriusque Numidiae partibus habent veluti monachos quos circumcelliones vocamus, agrestes et audacissimos daemonum famulos, qui non solum in alios acriter saeviunt, verum etiam sibi ipsis miseri omnino non parcunt. Nam per mortes varias, maximeque praecipitiorum et aquarum et ignium, sese interficere consuerunt et ad hunc exitum ex utroque sexu quantos potuerint seducunt. Aliquando etiam quos invenerint rogant ut ab eis occidantur, mortem nisi fecerint comminantes. Quod verum est, multis Donatistarum displicent tales, sed hoc verbo, non opere. Nam si vere displicerent, utique talibus non communicarent, qui per totum orbem ecclesiis unius Caeciliani crimen impingunt.*

of the 'Parmenians' as a principal division of the dissident Church in Africa.³³ But he is also drawing on some of Augustine's description, since he at least has the more appropriate internal label of *Donatistae* for the Donatists, and he copies his whole observation that many 'Donatists' disapprove of the circumcellions and their deeds. Second, in a passage that is included in his 61st heresy, that of the *Patriciani*, he extracts ideas on the suicidal martyrdoms of the circumcellions and earlier notices on them as *biothanati* and attributes these characteristics to a heresy whose origins he locates in Numidia Superior and Mauretania:

The sixty-first heresy is that of the *Patriciani*, who take their origin from *Patricius* ... Some of them even ask persons whom they encounter (and who are otherwise completely unknown to them) to kill them. This madness began some time ago in the region of Upper Numidia and Mauretania. Then, following their example, some wretched Donatists, in order that they might be considered to be martyrs, began to throw themselves off mountain tops. But by abandoning eternal life within the Catholic faith, as *biothanati* they have found only eternal death. Optatus was chosen to do battle against them.³⁴

The reason for this odd split is that the author is using different sources, and with little discrimination. Outside Augustine's 'Book of Heresies' he found items that indicated the circumcellions' deranged desire for martyrdom and the fact that they were *biothanati*. As we have seen, Augustine had removed these items from his account of the circumcellions. Since this author wished to exploit as much of the existing circumcellion material as possible, however, he transferred these characteristics to his description of other heretics named *Patriciani*. His entry on the Donatists and circumcellions therefore is taken almost wholly from Augustine. He rephrases some of the Augustinian additions to the tradition, but they are still clearly identifiable. For example, the Sallustian phrase that Augustine added to own his description of the circumcellions: *genus hominum agreste et famosissimae audaciae* is altered by our author to *agrestes et audacissimos daemonum famulos*. The reason for the alteration is not just one of stylistic variation. The change in phrase provides us with a small clue to a critical additional step in the formation of the external tradition. First, it is important to note the consensus that the author came from a southern Italian background (an observation that will have later resonances) an epicentre in the early development of independent monastic communities in the western Mediterranean world. The alteration is connected to

³³ Parmenian was the dissident bishop of Carthage from the 360s to his death about 393; his important period of activity preceded the period when Augustine became active in spearheading the final anti-Donatist crusade of the Catholic Church in Africa.

³⁴ 'Praedestinatus', *Liber de haeresibus*, 61, in Oehler, *Corpus Haereseologicum*, vol. 1, pp. 255–6: *Sexagesimam et primam haeresim Patriciani fecerunt, a Patricio sumentes exordium . . . Ex his sunt aliquanti qui etiam rogant eos, quos invenerint ignotos, ut ab eis occidantur. Haec insania in partibus Numidiae superioris et Mauretaniae coepit olim. Hos miseri Donatistae postea secuti coeperunt se montis praecipitio quasi futuri martyres tradere, ut qui vitam aeternam catholicae fidei derelinquunt, biothanati aeternam mortem inveniant. Contra hos Optatus legitur egisse.*

another slight, but significant, addition that this author made to the tradition. He is the first to insert into a description of the circumcellions his understanding that these men were ones who lived *velut monachos*: their mode of life is 'like that of monks.'³⁵ Although this innovation begins life rather innocently as no more than a descriptive simile, it was to have a long and influential history.

The context in which our 'Praedestinatus' made the suggestion allows one better to understand the reasons for his alteration of Augustine's evocative Sallustian description of circumcellions as a *genus hominum agreste* that was intended to raise the spectre of savage and primitive men of the countryside as imagined in Sallust's account of the Catilinarian conspiracy. Augustine's use of Sallustian imagery made good sense in North Africa, given the real background of actual circumcellions that was well known to Augustine and to his peers. But this was incomprehensible to those outside Africa who were working on the basis of a highly schematic caricature of a suicide cult. The author therefore reworded the appropriate Augustinian description to make these men 'rough and wild servants of demons.' Working with the caricature and the basic categorization of the circumcellions as a heresy, the author thinks of them as a species of wild, out-of-control, and heretical monastic.

Given local realities found outside of Africa where these views of circumcellions were being produced, these few words were something to which non-African writers were readily and easily attracted, and onto which they could graft materials on bad monks that were ready to hand. In the next sentence in our author we see much the same sort of misreading of Augustine's original. Augustine speaks of the circumcellions who, by the use of force, 'seduced' other people of both sexes to their side – that is, to join the ranks of the dissident Church. The author of this piece, however, understands the statement in more vivid hues that are coloured by the existing caricature. For him, the circumcellions seduce others to the same death-cult and suicidal ends as themselves. What we see in this southern Italian source of the mid-fifth century, therefore, is a further elaboration of the caricature with the critical invention of the idea – no doubt based on local realities, as well as the debates and the discourses in which the writer himself was involved – that the circumcellions were a species of wild and dangerous monk.

This external Latin tradition on 'the Donatists' and the circumcellions then begins to wend its way back into the truly exiguous number of eastern sources concerned with western miscreants. It is visible, for example, in the mid-fifth century in Theodoret of Cyrrhus' study of heresies, his *Hairetikês Kakomuthiai Logoi* or 'Bad Stories of Heresy' dated to about 451.³⁶ The fourth book of this work

³⁵ G. A. Cecconi, 'Il 'Praedestinatus' (I 69) come fonte sul donatismo', *L'Africa romana*, 9 (1992), pp. 865–79, at p. 870, notes this particular addition to the tradition (as well as some others); unfortunately, however, based on Hahn's text, he accepts the 'Tyconius' text on the circumcellions as genuinely Tyconian at p. 873.

³⁶ Theodoret Cyrrhensis, *Haereticarum fabularum liber*, in J. P. Migne (ed.), PG, 83 (Paris, 1859), IV.5 cols 423–4; Theodoret might have acquired this information from Africans who were seeking refuge in the East in the aftermath of the Vandal invasion. It is an

contains a listing and a description of heresies, all of them eastern, from Arius to Eutychus, with the solitary exception of the sixth heresy entitled *peri Donatistôn* ('concerning the Donatists'). As with other parts of this later tradition, the cross identification of 'Donatists' with Arians is made. Although a false identification, it was the closest analogue that eastern theologians could strike, given their crude knowledge of what was happening in the Latin West. The passage is worth quoting in its entirety. It should be noted that the circumcellions are never named as such and that the traits that are habitually connected with them in the western tradition are here indiscriminately mixed in with those attributed to 'the Donatists' in general:

In that part of the world which in former times was known as Libya, but now as Africa, the common enemy [that is, the Devil] has established the madness of those who are called Donatists. As far as heresy is concerned, these men share some features in common with the followers of Arius, but they have devised a new and strange type of madness. They call [any type of] violent death a martyrdom, and those persons who desire this name make this known early on to their fellow believers. These others then take care of them in every way possible, and also bring every type of food to them as if, indeed, they were feeding and fattening up sacrificial victims. After having been supported in these delicacies as much as possible, they then compel those whom they happen to encounter on the public roads to use their swords to strike them lethal blows. Some succeed in this aim, but some of them fail. For which sane man would willingly bring a charge of murder on himself? It is even recorded that they throw themselves down off of high precipices, in the manner of the wild Corybantes. Indeed, I myself in telling my stories about the Arians wish to tell something that is relevant to these practices. Out of a great multitude of their people, some of them, having driven themselves to a deranged state of mind, encountered a strong young man. But when he drew out a bare sword, they ordered him to inflict wounds on them. Indeed, they threatened to cut him up if he did not do what they ordered. The young man then said that he was afraid that once some of them had been killed, the others who survived would change their mind and would then take him to court and exact a penalty from him. He said that they would have to tie themselves up first and that only then would he strike them with his sword. When they obeyed and had been tied up with bonds, he did indeed strike all of them, but with the lashes of a cane. Then, leaving them tied up, he simply walked away from them. Truly, it was the evil demon who had injected such madness into these men.³⁷

Here the circumcellions as a specific social group bearing the precise name are irrelevant to the construction of the heresy. Indeed, there does not even appear to be much of a local 'vertical' or genealogical connection with the earlier eastern tradition represented by Epiphanius. Some parts of it are the result of 'dribblets' of information coming to the East. The story of the 'young man,' for example, was a

event whose effects he noted, with reference to the refugee Bishop Florentius: *Ep.*, 22, in Y. Azéma (ed. and tr.), SC, 40, 98 (Paris, 1955–64). He also notes the eyewitness testimony of another African refugee, Maximianus: *Ep.*, 23. Most striking, however, is the collection of letters, *Ep.*, 29–36, on the refugee Celestiacus, a man of curial rank from Carthage, for whom Theodoret was seeking assistance from a wide range of personal contacts; cf. *Ep.*, 70 for a similar case. I would like to thank Mr. Adam Schor for the suggestion and for his assistance with references.

³⁷ Theodoret Cyrrensis, *Haereticarum fabularum liber*, IV.5.

dramatic vignette to which Augustine had access and to which he referred, briefly, in 417 in his long letter-brief to Bonifatius.³⁸ Theodoret's description of the bizarre and violent behaviour that he identifies solely with 'the Donatists' therefore serves to underscore one point. Whoever and whatever the circumcellions actually were in Africa, they were *not* comprehended or understood by persons in the eastern Mediterranean Greek tradition. Indeed, the *circumcelliones* never appear by name in this eastern tradition, an observation which in itself serves to obviate much needless modern speculation about 'Greek names' for them. Insofar as excessive suicidal zeal for martyrdom is concerned, if it is mentioned at all it is simply connected, as here, with the dissident movement of the Donatists in general.

Closer to the end of the external western Latin tradition on the circumcellions in late Antiquity, and coming from the northern Italian foyer, are some brief remarks found in Cassiodorus. These are contained, significantly, in a consideration of Psalm 132, whose words, in contexts outside Africa, frequently prompted discussions of the virtues of monastic life.³⁹ As Cassiodorus himself suggests in the introduction to his comments, this particular Psalm had already become part of debates on the virtues and vices of monasticism:

Although some have thought that this message is addressed to monks, my view is that it pertains to the unity of Christians in general, since it is proclaimed not only to monastic communities but to the whole Church ... [therefore] although I do not dispute that it is addressed to holy monasteries, its message should not be isolated from the general body [that is, of Christianity].⁴⁰

In commenting on Psalms 132:1, and specifically on the verse 'Consider how good and pleasant it is to live as brothers in common (or, in unity)' (*Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum*), Cassiodorus is drawn to the parallels between the ideals of confraternal property and sharing, and the ideals propagated by monastic communities:

'To inhabit,' which is to say, to continue with the same good intent or purpose. The habitation that God seeks is not a construction with walls that contains bodies, but a place

³⁸ Augustine, *Ep.*, 185.3.12: *Unde quidam illos sic inclusisse perhibetur, ut eos tamquam percutiendos ligari et dimitti iuberet atque ita eorum impetum incruentus et inlaesus evaderet*. Either a more elaborate version existed which was known to Augustine and to which he only alludes in this letter, or the story became elaborated via another tradition to which Theodoret had access – probably the former.

³⁹ Inside Africa, by contrast, normal recourse to this very same verse was *not* to prompt thoughts about monasticism. Rather, the words of the verse were used in debates about the unity of the Church, a quite different political theme: see, e.g., Optatus, *Contra Parmenianum*, M. Labrousse (ed. and tr.), SC, 412 (Paris, 1995), 2.15.2; 3.7.7; 4.4.2.

⁴⁰ Cassiodorus, *Expositio in Psalmos*, M. Adriaen (ed.), CCSL, 98 (Turnhout, 1958), 132: *Quod licet ad monachos quidam aptandum esse iudicauerint, nos tamen dicimus et ad generalitatis concordiam pertinere, quoniam hoc non tantum monasteriis, sed universae promuntiatur Ecclesiae. Non enim reluctor beatis monasteriis dictum sed nec generalitati aestimo subtrahendum*.

that joins human spirits by means of a holy association. By this sort of definition, he [sc. the Psalmist] excludes circumcellions who wander about here and there with a purpose that is vacillating and quite different from that found in a monastic community.⁴¹

Cassiodorus' entire discussion in this section of his commentary is devoted to the common life that characterized monastic communities. The only conception that he has of circumcellions is that they are *like* monks (and hence the comparison). But he is not willing to include them as true monastics because the spirit and intent of their wanderings is quite at odds with the higher values of a genuine monastic community. That is to say, we see here the continuation of the same Italian tradition that had by the mid-fifth century produced the idea that the circumcellions were a kind of wandering and uncontrolled, if not violent, monk.

The final heir to the whole external picture of the circumcellion is Isidore of Seville, who, at the end of Antiquity, managed to construct his own outsider's perspective, which became the final word on the subject in late Antiquity. This is the definition and concept of the circumcellion that will be bestowed on medieval European tradition. From this point onward, *circumcellio* will be used as a word that now exists independently of *any* referent in Africa to describe vagrant clerics in local societies. It is part of the combined external picture of them as violent monks and a suicidal martyr cult. Isidore's earliest notice on circumcellions is manifestly drawn from a tradition that combined lists of heresies on the one side with lists of monastics and ecclesiastical orders on the other. Composed in the first decade of the seventh century, his treatise *De ecclesiasticis officiis* ('On Church Offices') merges the two listing traditions to produce a strange pastiche-like picture of holy vagrant hucksters. It is important to note that the circumcellions are included as the fifth type in a list of six categories of monks – three of which are good and three of which are bad – and that Isidore is also drawing on the tradition going back to Filastrius in which they are called 'circellions' rather than 'circumcelliones':

The fifth type [that is, of monk] are the *circellions* who in the cover of monks wander everywhere, carrying off their pretence for personal profit, wandering around the provinces, not having been sent by anyone, and not having any fixed place of abode, never staying anywhere nor having settled homes. Some invent fictions about things they have not seen, presenting their own views as if they were those of God; others sell the body parts of martyrs (if indeed they are those of martyrs); others exalt their fringes and phylacteries, seeking a sense of glory from their listeners; still others walk around long-haired (so that the sacred cut will be held to be cheaper than their long hair) so that anyone who sees them will think them one of those ancients whom we read about – as a Samuel or an Elijah or one of the others. Still others proclaim that they have offices, which they in fact have not received. Others say to those who are listening to them that they have parents and relatives in this or that place, and they lie that they are just travelling to see them. And all of them beg, and they extort from everyone either the expenses of their

⁴¹ Cassiodorus, *Expositio in Psalmos*, 132.1: *Habitare, id est in bono proposito permanere. Ipsa est enim habitatio quam Dominus quaerit, non tecta parietum quae consociat corpora, sed quae animas religiosa societate coniungit. Tali enim dicto prohibet circumcelliones, qui diversa monasterio voluntate mutabili pervagantur.*

costly poverty or the price of their pretended holiness. In the meantime, wherever these men have been apprehended when they are caught involved in their evil deeds and words, or whenever they have been charged as infamous persons, the movement that goes under the general name of monks is cursed.⁴²

Here we have entered into a realm of pure fiction, all of it, it might be noted with some irony, propagated by Isidore rather than by the 'lying false monks' whom he himself seems to have invented. The various sources in this literary collage are discernible. Some go back to sources naming them as *circelliones*, while other strands are derived from the idea, gradually developed and elaborated, that the circumcellions were vagrant monks, and false ones at that.

The source of the rest can easily be identified. Once the idea that the circumcellions were a species of monk had been made outside North Africa, the works of Augustine could then be carefully sifted through to find references to wandering false monks. The fact that Augustine himself never once thought that the circumcellions were malicious monks – or indeed, any type of monk – was beside the point. Indeed, on those occasions when Augustine was specifically faced with talk about bad, if not very bad, Catholic monastics and where he could easily have pointed to 'Donatist' circumcellions as their evil counterpart, he signally failed to do so.⁴³ But if one was convinced a priori that circumcellions were a species of monastic, then it could be *assumed* that Augustine must have been speaking about the same men when he wrote about monks. The only problem that then faced the diligent researcher was to find some explicit Augustinian text on monks, preferably

⁴² Isidore, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, C.M. Lawson (ed.), CCSL, 113 (Turnhout, 1989), 2.16.7–8: *Quintum genus est circellionum qui sub habitu monachorum usquequaque vagantur, venalem circumferentes ypocrisin, circumeuntes provincias, nusquam missi nusquam fixi, nusquam stantes nusquam sedentes. Alii quae non viderunt confingunt, opiniones suas habentes pro deo; alii membra martyrum, si tamen martyrum, vinditant; alii fimbrias et filacteria sua magnificant, gloriam captantes ab hominibus; alii criniti incedunt ne vilior habeatur tonsa sanctitas quam comata, ut videlicet qui eos viderit antiquos illos quos legimus cogitet Samuhelem et Heliam et ceteros; alii honores quos non acceperunt habere se protestantur; alii parentes et consanguineos in illa vel illa regione se audisse vivere, et ad eos pergere mentiuntur; et omnes petunt, omnes exigunt aut sumptum lucrosae egestatis aut simulatae pretium sanctitatis; cum interea, ubicumque in factis suis malis ac verbis deprehensi fuerint vel quoquo modo innotuerint, sub generali nomine monachorum propositum blasphematur.*

⁴³ Augustine, *Contra Litteras Petiliani Libri Tres*, M. Petschenig (ed.), CSEL, 52 (Leipzig, 1909), III.40.48, where Petilian launches a vituperative attack on monks and monastics: '*Deinceps perrexit ore maledico in vituperationem monasteriorum et monachorum.*' He attacks Augustine for having invented this form of religious life. But it is significant that in his refutation Augustine *never* points to the circumcellions. The connection *never* occurs to him, but he surely would not have missed this point if he could have made it. Furthermore, in a consideration of the relevance of the *De opere monachorum* for the more aggressive wandering monastics of the eastern Mediterranean, it has been demonstrated how little overlap there is between the African and the eastern Mediterranean phenomena: D. Caner, 'Conflicting Assumptions of Orthodox Monastic Practice in the West', in his *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), pp. 117–25.

bad ones. The necessary additional evidence was provided by Augustine's *De opere monachorum*. In the passages concerned, it must be stated as firmly as possible that Augustine is saying nothing whatsoever about circumcellions or men like them. They are never once averred to by name or even by allusion in the whole of his treatise.⁴⁴ Rather, the work is a discussion of monastic life, and of legitimate and illegitimate forms of monastic life. Augustine warns that monks must live a life that would be approved of by Christ, a life which will not excite the disapproval of non-Christians and give them grounds for criticism of the faith:

Slaves of God, soldiers of Christ! It is in this way that you will foil the ambushes of that most cunning enemy [that is, the Devil], who fears your good reputation, that good odour of Christ, so that people of good spirit will not say 'we will run after the fragrance of *your* perfumes.' [Cant. 1:3]. In this way you will avoid the snares of that enemy of ours with all of his stench – he who has dispersed through the world so many hypocrites who live in the dress of monks, who wander around the provinces, never sent by anyone, never settled, never stopping, never having fixed abodes. Some sell the bodily parts of martyrs (if indeed they are martyrs); others exalt their fringes and phylacteries. Some of them say to those who listen to them that they have parents or relatives in this or that region – and they lie that they are travelling just to see them. They all beg, and they all extort, either the costs of their profitable poverty or the price of their pretended holiness; in the meantime they have been caught here and there doing their evil deeds; or they are declared infamous in some way, then your good purpose is cursed under the general name of 'monks' – something which is so good and so holy, that we desire it in the name of Christ – that, just as through other foreign lands, they should now spread and flourish throughout all of Africa.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, D. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont (eds), CCSL, 38–40 (Turnhout, 1956), 132.3, 6 is the one place where Augustine explicitly contrasts monks and circumcellions (prompted by Psalm 132, as was often the case for a contemplation of *monachi*, see Cassiodorus' response, below), only to deny any connection between the two. The only other passage in Augustine that might conceivably be construed as comparing monks and circumcellions is Augustine, *Epistula ad Catholicos de secta Donatistarum*, in M. Petschenig (ed.), CSEL, 52 (Leipzig, 1909), 16.41. The case has been argued forcefully by Calderone, 'Circumcellions', pp. 100–101. At most, however, the passage seems to be making a general contrast in the meaning of 'south' as the location of the true Church, arguing that the *meridies* must be southern Egypt, where there are thousands of the 'slaves of God' who form 'holy societies in the desert,' rather than southern Africa ravaged by 'gangs of mad circumcellions'. If there is any latent contrast, which seems doubtful, it is clearly a negative one.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *De opere monachorum*, J. Zycha (ed.), CSEL, 41 (Vienna, 1900), 28.36: *O servi Dei, milites Christi, itane dissimulatis callidissimi hostis insidias, qui bonam famam vestram, tam bonum Christi odorem, ne dicant animae bonae, Post odorem unguentorum tuorum curremus, et sic laqueos eius evadant omni putoribus suis, tam multos hypocritas sub habitu monachorum usquequaque dispersit, circumeuntes provincias, nusquam missos, nusquam fixos, nusquam stantes, nusquam sedentes. Alii membra martyrum, si tamen martyrum, venditant; alii fimbrias et phylacteria sua magnificant; alii parentes vel consanguineos suos in illa vel in illa regione se audisse vivere, et ad eos pergere mentiuntur; et omnes petunt, omnes exigunt, aut sumptus lucrosae egestatis, aut simulatae pretium sanctitatis: cum interea ubicumque in factis suis malis deprehensi fuerint, vel quoquo modo innotuerint, sub generali nomine monachorum vestrum propositum blasphematur, tam bonum, tam sanctum, quod in Christi nomine cupimus, sicut per alias terras, sic per totam Africam pullulare.*

Augustine's warnings about false monks were copied almost word for word by Isidore, or his source, omitting some phrases which only made the meaning intended by the original more difficult to discern. Isidore, or his source, then leapt forward several chapters in Augustine's work on monks to find another disreputable species of the genus – long-haired monks who deliberately cultivated a hirsute appearance – and, for good measure, threw these men in too as 'circumcellions.' The original text in Augustine reads:

These men who hawk around their venal hypocrisy and who are afraid lest the holy tonsure not be held to be inferior to their long locks, obviously wear their hair long so that anyone who happens to see them, might think them one of those ancients about whom we read: a Samuel or one of the others whose long hair was not cut.⁴⁶

In his usual manner, Isidore took this basic material and then elaborated and extended it somewhat by adducing other examples – Elijah the prophet is added to his list of the 'ancients' – to flesh out the general picture.

The image of the circumcellions that has now emerged is one that lives on in an odd world of its own, with no reference to *any* reality that had ever existed in the African countryside – a reality that is clear enough from the picture that can be drawn from the detailed descriptions of circumcellions and circumcellion behaviour in Optatus and Augustine. Any specific connection of circumcellions with North African society is now fading permanently from view. The circumcellions were always understood by Augustine himself to be a peculiarly African phenomenon. In borrowing from Augustine's writings on monastics, however, Isidore has turned them into a species of men who wander around the provinces of the empire in general. Thus, by Isidore's time, the critical point of local context was gradually being lost in the external tradition and, by default of specificity and the power of suggestion, the circumcellions were becoming a general western European phenomenon. Step by step, a completely fictitious being had been created – the violent wandering monk, the vagrant religious huckster.

Isidore also included a definition of the term *circumcelliones* in his *Etymologiarum sive Originum*. This definition might have contained information useful for our purposes, were it not for the fact that it is included in the eighth book of his work that is entitled 'De ecclesia et sectis' which immediately indicates the field or genre within which it falls. It is the same tradition that we have just examined that considered the circumcellions under the rubric of a strange religious sect or heretical movement, a tradition that was fictively created outside Africa. After offering general definitions of 'heresy' and 'schism,' and having advanced to defining the 'heresies of the Jews,' Isidore finally arrives at 'the heresies of the

⁴⁶ Augustine, *De opere monachorum*, 31.39: *Illi enim venalem circumferentes hypocrisim, timent ne vilior habeatur tonsa sanctitas quam comata, ut videlicet qui eos videt, antiquos illos quos legimus cogitet, Samuelem et ceteros qui non tondebantur.*

Christians'. In this section, he basically re-runs the same canonical lists of heresies that began with Epiphanius in the East and Filastrius in the West, and that were combined by the editorial skills of Augustine and his secretarial assistants at Hippo. Isidore finally arrives at the 'Donatistae' (8.5.51), and it is as a sub-species of them that the circumcellions are defined:

Circumcelliones are called by this name on the ground that they are rough countrymen whom they call *cotopitai*, and who share the teaching of the above mentioned heresy [that is, of the Donatists]. Because of their love of martyrdom, these men commit suicide, so that, by departing from this life violently, they might acquire the name of martyrs.⁴⁷

As a dictionary definition this simply emphasizes some odd aspects of circumcellions which would lead one to believe that they were unusual rustic types who were also a suicide cult. But what was Isidore's source for the odd word *cotopitai*? And from what source did he draw his definition of circumcellions? With the discovery of a hitherto unknown manuscript of a work by Isidore found in the Escorial Library and published in 1940 by Angel Vega, we can see some of the connections. The definition was drawn from Isidore's very own *Liber de haeresibus* ('Book of Heresies').⁴⁸ In it he gives definitions of Donatists (heresy number 42), the Mountaineers (heresy number 43), and the circumcellions (separated from these by a few intervening heresies as heresy number 47).⁴⁹

Circumcellions are those who, because of their mad desire for martyrdom, in the midst of offering up prayers, kill themselves by means of the sword or by fire, so that, by dying violent deaths, they might acquire the name of martyrs.

Here suicidal martyrdom is highlighted, although the characteristic death by precipitation, so important to North African realities, has now been discarded. A

⁴⁷ Isid. *Orig.* VIII.5.53: *Circumcelliones dicti eo quod agrestes sint quos 'cotopitas' vocant, supradictae haeresis habentes doctrinam, Hi amore martyrii semetipsos perimunt, ut violenter de hac vita discedentes martyres nominentur.* There is a small problem with the sourcing of the passage as Isidore has constructed it. Although he is fairly scrupulous in following the order of the existing 'heresy lists', he does depart from them occasionally, and without clear explanation. So it is in this case. Following the order in the standard heresy lists, the series in 8.5.51–53 ought to run sequentially: Donatistae – Montenses – Circumcellionae, but Isidore has the sequence: Donatistae – Bonosiaci – Circumcelliones.

⁴⁸ A. C. Vega (ed.), *S. Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi De Haeresibus liber* (Madrid, 1940), p. 35 (the text can also be found in PL. Supp. 4: 1818–19): *Circumcelliones insano amore martyrii semet ipsos interdum orantes igne vel gladio pereunt, ut violenter occisi, martyres nominentur.*

⁴⁹ It is not clear why this separation has taken place (the intervening heresies are the Eluidiani, the Iovinianistae, and the Luciferiani, and the heresy immediately preceding are the Tertullianistae). In this work, Isidore defines 'Donatistae' as '*quamvis eiusdem substantiae, tamen minorem filium patre, filioque spiritum sanctum praedicant. Catholicos etiam rebaptizant*' – therefore as persons who are primarily defined by their Arian propensities and only secondarily as rebaptizers. He defines 'Montenses' as '*cum Donatistis et Novatianis pari errore discurrunt.*'

clue to the origin of the lemma comes from the phrase *interdum orantes*, which appears only in the text of the south-Italian *Indiculus de haeresibus*. We can therefore see that Isidore has drawn part of his later dictionary definition from an earlier heresy list which he had reworked into his own 'Book of Heresies'. What has been prefixed to it is the remark about the *cotopitai*. Where did Isidore find this odd word? It has occasioned all sorts of extravagant etymological guesswork from unusual Greek dialects to Coptic. I think that the best guess about the word's origins, and it is only that, is that it *might* be a neo-Punic dialectical term or perhaps an indigenous African 'Libyan' word for these men, a word whose original significance is therefore lost to us.⁵⁰ Or, equally, it could well be nothing other than a copying error, or other misidentification, of the author of the *Indiculus*. But Isidore knew that the term was not Greek (he does not gloss it in his usual fashion with such words). And *his* source for it is obvious: he had simply copied it from the same south-Italian *Indiculus*.

Isidore was the final word on circumcellions in Antiquity. His work was then taken as the basis for the last references to these men in late Antiquity in the Gallic heresy lists that copied Isidore. First, Honorius of Augustodunum. Following the heresy of the Floriani, but before that of the Bonosiani and the Priscillianists, he placed the heresy of the circumcellions:

Those men are called circumcellions because they are savages, whom they call Cothopithai. Moved by love of martyrdom these men kill themselves so that, by departing from this life violently, they might be called martyrs. Augustine frequently reviled these same men.⁵¹

The final author in this ancient tradition is Gennadius of Massilia, who produced another heresy list largely derived from Isidore. He placed the circumcellions after the heresies of the Floriani, the Donatists and the Bonosiaci:

⁵⁰ I say this because whatever 'basic data' were coming out of Africa was part of the general flow of information being directed to the designation of heresies. As another part of this *same* stream of information, we know that the Montenses at Rome were also designated by what appears to be a parallel and equivalent local African name, the *Cutzupitani*: see Augustine, *Contra Litteras Petiliani Libri Tres*, M. Petschenig (ed.), CSEL, 52 (Leipzig, 1909), II.108.247: notice on the Montenses, but without the parallel African name; Augustine, *Epistula ad Catholicos*, 3.6: precisely the same notice, but with the parallel term: *cutzupitanis vel montensibus*; *Ep.*, 53.1.2: *montensium vel cutzupitanorum*. Therefore, it only makes sense that these very same sources would be feeding information on the circumcellions in precisely the same mode (Latin name/African name) and so they were designated *circumcelliones/cotispitai* in the same fashion as we have *Montenses/cutzupitani*. Suspicion therefore strongly favours the idea that the writer of the *Indiculus* picked this up from the flow of information coming from Africa that is also reflected in Augustine. The word is certainly not Greek or, of all things, Coptic. Given the source, the best options are neo-Punic or some form of Libyan.

⁵¹ Honorius Augustodunensis, *De Haeresibus Liber*, 42, in Oehler, *Corpus Haereseologicum*, vol. 1, p. 318: *Circumcelliones dicti quod agrestes sint, quos Cothopithas dicunt. Hi amore martyrii semetipsos perimunt, ut violenter de hoc vita discendentes martyres nominentur. Hos quoque saepe sugillat Augustinus.*

Circumcellions, that is to say savages, who are likewise known as Cotopitae, followers of the heresy of the above-named men. Moved by love of martyrdom, they kill themselves, in order that they might be called martyrs.⁵²

With Gennadius, the line of direct descent of the heresy lists and their contribution to knowledge of the circumcellions ends.

But there *is* one final source on the circumcellions that is normally considered to be 'internal' and which on hypothetical grounds should therefore be accorded the status of high quality primary evidence. The author ascribed to this account – the African theologian and ecclesiastical writer, Tyconius – would indeed accord this source a high order of credibility. After all, Tyconius was a fellow African and contemporary of Augustine's, writing out of the heart of the dissident Christianity community, probably through the decades of the 370s to the mid-380s. The argument here, however, will be that Tyconius is *not* the author of the critical passage that has been attributed to him.⁵³ My negative argument is important, since this evidence has usually been taken to be authentically Tyconian, derived from a good internal (that is, African) source and that it therefore gives us credible independent information on the circumcellions.⁵⁴ The passage is said to derive from Tyconius' commentary on the book of *Revelation*.⁵⁵ In reality, the source from which it is taken is from the work on the Apocalypse written by the eighth-century Spanish priest Beatus of Liébana.⁵⁶

Whatever the source of this particular passage might be, it is not possible to believe from its contents alone that Tyconius was the author of the passage. First of all, Tyconius was a man of some considerable intellectual power and acumen, a writer who, although he was closely identified for a long time with the dissident Church in Africa, was respected by Augustine as a mind of the first order – a critical

⁵² Gennadius Massiliensis, *Liber de Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus*, 69, in Oehler, *Corpus Haereseologicum*, vol. 1, p. 331: *Circumcelliones, id est agrestes, item Cotopitae, superiorum haeresin sectantes. Hi amore martyrii semetipsos interimunt, ut martyres nominentur.*

⁵³ P. Monceaux, 'Tyconius', chapter 5 of *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique Chrétienne*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1920, repr. Brussels, 1960), pp. 165–219, remains one of the best general introductions.

⁵⁴ For example, see Diesner, 'Methodisches und Sachliches (1959)', pp. 1011–12/58–9; Frend, *The Donatist Church*, pp. 172–3, and in almost every other publication on the subject since: for example, 'The *Cellae* of the African Circumcellions', p. 89; 'Circumcellions and Monks', p. 544, as well as, 'Heresy and Schism as Social and National Movements', pp. 46–7, and 'A Note on Religion and Life', p. 266.n. 34, amongst many places where 'Tyconius' is adduced in support; Tengström, *Donatisten und Katholiken*, pp. 38, 56; Schulten, *De Circumcellionen*, pp. 44–9 and Rubin, 'Mass Movements', p. 157, are exemplary of others.

⁵⁵ For background on the text, see K. B. Steinhauser, *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius: A History of its Reception and Influence* (Frankfurt–New York, 1987).

⁵⁶ The assignation of the work to Beatus seems reasonable, if not certain. For discussion of the background and the problems in their Spanish context, see R. Collins, *The Arab Conquest of Spain, 710–97* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 224–7.

martyrs who are simultaneously false monks. A strange term is offered as a designation and is claimed to be a *vocabulum Graecum*. All of this unmasks a fundamental ignorance about who these men were and what they were doing, something that seems almost impossible to ascribe to a learned North African who must have been quite knowledgeable about the basic facts of life in his own homeland. If the whole passage is placed back in context, it is seen to belong to another list, almost precisely like the one redacted by Isidore when he lists six different kinds (*genera*) of monks, amongst them the 'false' types of which the *circilliones* (circumcellions) were one. In this section 'Tyconius' is speaking of 'false brothers' (*falsi fratres*) or monastics and in the specific subsection that is in question he has a sub-category of these false brothers, namely false prophets.⁵⁹ That is to say, the *circilliones* are labelled as the third type of false prophet of which the fourth type is the 'hypocrite.' This is manifestly a fundamental error of identification that would not have been made by an educated African churchman who lived during the height of circumcellion activities. It is just not possible that he would have thought of them fundamentally as a species of pseudo-prophet, of which there is no inkling in any African sources.

Who was the author? The confident assertion that *cotopita* was a *vocabulum Graecum* reveals appalling ignorance, especially for a writer like Tyconius who knew his Greek very well. Tyconius had used the original Greek version of the book of *Revelation* for his new commentary. And he also used the original Greek text for his new translation in which he corrected and updated the old Latin versions that still had authority in North Africa in his own day. Therefore, we are not dealing with a source from the eastern Mediterranean or a Greek one from the West. And not one from North Africa either. The idea that the circumcellions were categorized as an *agreste genus hominum* is an Augustinian Sallustianism which, as we have seen, was taken up earlier in this same external tradition. But the odd idea that the circumcellions were 'false brothers' and a species of 'false prophet' is one that was developed at length by Isidore of Seville with some fabrication, either by himself or by another. Our attention must therefore be directed to a Spanish source, and the fact that the manuscript is that of Beatus of Liébana would add support to the suspicion that we are dealing with a Spanish rather than an African tradition.⁶⁰

It is fairly certain that Beatus, a Spanish priest who published his commentary on the Apocalypse in 776, drew heavily on earlier works for his own book. As one modern scholar has observed, 'the work is not the product of a subtle or deep thinker, but rather that of a tireless compiler and polemicist'.⁶¹ To understand better the context in which the reference to circumcellions is found, it might be useful to review briefly the structure of the work itself. It is introduced with a dedicatory

⁵⁹ Beatus, *In Apocalypsin*, 5: ... *in hoc pseudoprophetae quattuor membra sunt, id est: Haereticus ... Alius est schismaticus ... Alius est superstitiosus ... Quartus est hypocrita.*

⁶⁰ Steinhauser, 'Beatus of Liébana: the Life and Writings of Beatus', Chapter 1 in *The Apocalypse Commentary*, pp. 142–8.

⁶¹ Steinhauser, *The Apocalypse Commentary*, p. 143.

ran to his bookshelf and picked off of it the dictionary and heresy lists of his Spanish predecessor Isidore of Seville. There he found the odd definition that could explain to his tenth-century readers in Spain just who these strange men were, and also the reference to the *cotopitai*. Although he got this piece of information from Isidore, Isidore was not so benighted as to say that the word was Greek. But Beatus, noting the constant identification of strange words in Isidore as being the Greek equivalent of a Latin word, simply leapt to the idea that *cotopita* was a *vocabulum Graecum*. It is Beatus and Isidore who are at fault, however, not Tyconius. Beatus' work is *not* an original Tyconian text and it sheds no independent light on circumcellions. Rather, it simply reiterates the canonical external mirage of these men as uncontrolled itinerant monks, who also happen to be a suicidal death cult, and it also perpetrates an odd piece of linguistic lore about so-called *cotopitai*.

As for the rest of what is found in Beatus, it is simply a pastiche of the external tradition that links certain elements that were taken from Augustine combined with the existing material on circumcellions as monks. To this, however, Beatus, or his source, has added an additional statement of utmost importance that is new. It is the last sentence of the entry that specifically states that the circumcellions, as roving monastics, make it their custom to wander around visiting the shrines of holy men or saints (martyrs) 'as if for the salvation of their souls'.⁶⁷ This additional piece of information, found only in Beatus, has been quoted time and again, in support of the thesis that the circumcellions were a species of wandering ascetics who centred their lives on the shrines of martyrs in North Africa. The evidence has always had a sort of conclusive aura about it. Since it is cited with the name of Tyconius as its author, it must surely be a singularly powerful piece of evidence on circumcellion behaviour. The author, however, is *not* Tyconius, but rather Beatus or an immediate predecessor in Spain, and the information is just as much a fiction as the rest of the monastic picture of the circumcellions constructed by this external tradition – it must therefore be discarded from serious historical inquiry on the African phenomenon. But the question might usefully be asked, what is the source of *this* idea?

The answer, perhaps, is to be found in that same southern Italian tradition that first spawned the fiction that the circumcellions were monks. It is clear that in the mid-fifth century in Italy south of Rome the whole question of monastics was being hotly debated – above all the problem of the regulation of their behaviour. We can witness the results of this need to regulate only about a century later with the production of the *Regula Magistri* and again with the *Regula* of St. Benedict of Nursia. The *Regula Benedicti* begins with a list of the types of monks that we have already seen: good and bad kinds. In order, they are his two good types, the *coenobitae* and the *anachoritae*, followed by two bad types. First, the *tertium genus*

⁶⁷ Beatus, *In Apocalypsin*, 5: ... *sed, ut diximus, diversas terras circuire et sanctorum sepulchra pervidere, quasi pro salute animae suae: sed nihil eis proderit, quia hoc sine consilio communi fratrum faciunt.*

monachorum, which is *taeterrimum*: the *sarabaitae*; then, the fourth kind of monks, who are also very bad, and who are known as the *girovagi*, the ‘those who wanderer around’:

The fourth species of monks are those who are named *girovagi*. These are men whose whole life is spent wandering through different provinces, spending two or three day periods in the *cellae* of different monks – always wandering and never fixed, always slaves to their own whims and their stomachs, in all respects they are even more detestable than the *sarabaitai*.⁶⁸

Benedict closes this sorry chapter of monkdom with the remark that ‘it is better to be silent about the miserable behaviour of these latter disreputable types’, and that with the help of God ‘it is better to drop the subject and to get on with the regulation of the strong and the good *coenobitae*’. Fortunately, however, the more extensive earlier southern Italian tradition, and debates, on which Benedict was drawing, have been preserved for us in the text of the earlier *Regula Magistri*. And these make clear that such debates over the behaviour of bad monks had a longer and deeper history in the region.

Once these various images of the *circumcelliones* had coalesced into a general picture of wild wandering monks who were itinerant religious quacks, and who were modestly threatening on the grounds of their mobility and lack of discipline, a new word was created that could be used in its own right to signify a perceived phenomenon that had little to do with African social realities of the fourth and fifth centuries. Consequently, the term passed into the Latin of the so-called ‘Middle Ages’ as one used to designate wild and wandering monks. The tradition begins with knowledge of circumcellions that is taken directly from the southern Italian tradition of regulation of loose or uncontrolled monastics, such as can be found in the ninth-century Smaragdus’ commentary on Benedict’s Rule.⁶⁹ Here Smaragdus offers a distillation of virtually verbatim definitions taken from the external tradition of the *girovagi* as ‘circumcellions’ who under the guise of monks carry out their nefarious activities, ‘circling around the provinces’. His final words of *semper et ubique*, however, reveal the new use of the term *circumcellio* to apply to a general phenomenon found everywhere. Guibertus, Abbé of Notre-Dame à Nogent-sur-

⁶⁸ *Regula Benedicti*, A. de Vogüé and J. Neufville (ed. and tr.), SC, 181–3 (Paris, 1972), I.1: *Quantum vero genus est monachorum quod nominatur girovagum, qui tota vita sua per diversas provincias ternis aut quaternis diebus per diversorum cellas hospitantur, semper vagi et numquam stabiles, et propriis voluntatibus et gulae inlecebris servientes, et per omnia deteriores sarbaitis.*

⁶⁹ Smaragdus, *Commentaria in Regulam Sancti Benedicti*, J. P. Migne (ed.), PL, 102 (Paris, 1851), 1. The comment is on the rule on the ‘fourth kind of monks who are called *gyrovagi*’: *Ergo gyrovagus dicendus est, ille qui vagus atque vagando aliorum cellas pariterque casas circuit. Ipsi et alio nomine circelliones vocantur, qui sub habitus monachorum hac illacque vagantur, venalem circumferentes hypocrisin. Circumeuntes provincias nusquam missi, nusquam fixi, nusquam stantes, nusquam sedentes; semper et ubique.*

adds nothing that is not already well attested from the internal sources (from which parts of it are obviously derived). Not only that, but authors in this tradition distorted and caricatured what they did know from internal sources to which they had access. What they add to what can be known from African sources is usually fictitious, and much of it rather misleading.

Is there anything this external tradition *can* tell us? Most important, I think, it offers interesting clues to the *interpretation* of the episodes of circumcellion violence in Africa. One must begin by noting that the external tradition begins its long life as part of the production of heresy lists. My argument has been that these heresy lists *specifically as lists* are in themselves not an innocent phenomenon. They are linked to the specific power aims of the central Church and the involvement of the state in ecclesiastical concerns in the late fourth century.⁷⁴ Appearing in great detail first in the East in the mid-370s, the literary presentation of stripped-down lists of categories of proscribed persons becomes emphatic in the West beginning in the late 380s and surely cannot be disconnected with the imperial Theodosian politics of the period. Within this more general context, it is important that the external interest in circumcellions is only part of the larger process of the labelling of 'the Donatists' who were now officially named and recognized as a heresy for the first time by the state. The circumcellions are only subsidiary players in this larger drama. The role that they had for the external audience was that of adding a specific element to the labelling of the Donatists: the presence of agents of violence and a dire threat to the civil order. Through the 390s and the first decades of the fifth century this is the vital signal given to us about the significance that circumcellions had in the power politics of Church and state outside Africa. This is also a useful signpost pointing back to debates inside Africa itself and to the construction there of the idea of a circumcellion threat. This is where the basic questions have to be asked about 'who' they were, and that question has to begin with a very clear idea of who they were *not*.

⁷⁴ These lists, as also Epiphanius, deserve more analysis as documents in themselves. One brief study notes the chronological convergence of these types of document, but retreats from offering any explanation: J. McClure, 'Handbooks Against Heresy in the West, from the Late Fourth to the Late Sixth Centuries', *JThS*, 30 (1979), pp. 186–97.

Chapter 12

From Donatist Opposition to Byzantine Loyalism: The Cult of Martyrs in North Africa 350–650

W. H. C. Frend

The Christian Church in North Africa existed for rather more than 500 years, from its first recorded mention in 180 AD to its final quasi-extinction after the defeat of the Berber queen, Kahena by the Arabs c.703.¹ During that time it contributed immensely to the theology and outlook of western Christendom. Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine were among its leaders who defined a theology of the Church which has influenced western thinking to this day. Augustine's theological understanding of sacraments, sin and predestination determined the attitudes of reformers and Catholics in the Reformation, and were only successfully challenged under the crisis of war in the first decades of the twentieth century. Alongside this doctrinal contribution, however, went a theological justification of coercion of dissent which has cast its baleful shadow over the history of the Church from the early centuries to our own.

A fervent cult of martyrs ran through the whole of the history of North African Christianity. This formed a background to much of the specifically North African understanding of Christian doctrine. If we leave on one side the reference in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (c.160 AD) to a debauched baker's wife – who despised the gods and worshipped some new-fangled deity of her own, 'whom she would call "one and only"' – the Church in North Africa enters the stage dramatically on 17 July 180.² On that date, a dozen native Christians from Scilli, evidently a small settlement near Carthage, were brought before the Proconsul, Vigellius Saturninus, charged with being Christians. No compromise was possible between the two sides.³ The Proconsul came over as a reasonable man, anxious, if possible, to spare people whom he regarded less as criminals than as deluded victims of an illicit superstition. 'We too are a religious people', he explained to the obstinate prisoners,

¹ On the fate of the Christian Church after this date, see Chapter 14 by Mark Handley in the present volume.

² Apul. *Met.*, 9.14: *quem praedicaret unicum*.

³ *Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum*, in H. Musurillo (ed. and tr.), *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972), 86–9.

‘and our religion is a simple one. We swear by the genius of our lord the emperor and we offer prayers for his health – as you also ought to do.’⁴ To which the leader of the Christians replied: ‘I do not recognize the empire of this world. Rather I serve that God whom no man has seen, or can see with these eyes. I have not stolen and on any purchase I pay the tax, for I acknowledge my lord who is emperor of kings and nations.’⁵ There was no going back. Rejecting the offer of a 30-day reprieve, the confessors proclaimed, ‘Today we are martyrs in heaven. Thanks be to God’, and cheerfully went to their deaths.⁶

For Tertullian such men and women entered prison accompanied by the Holy Spirit.⁷ On death they would become martyrs, the friends of Christ who would watch His judgement on the unbelieving pagan world on the Last Day.⁸ Martyrdom was a triumph.⁹ It was to be sought as the highest goal of the Christian life.

In the third century, the Christians experienced two periods of peace, each lasting about forty years, c.210–50 and 260–303. These were long enough for less drastic interpretations of the Christian faith to develop, and for authority in the Church to pass from martyrs and confessors to the clergy. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage 248–58, left no doubt that the episcopate embodied the authority of the Church and that in the common glorification of the martyr’s steadfastness, the greater portion belonged to the bishop.¹⁰

Cyprian himself was martyred on 14 September 258, a victim of the Valerianic persecution. His death united, for the time being, the two rival claims to authority within the North African Church – that of the martyr and that of the bishop. This was to be important in defining religious outlooks and allegiances among the North African Christians in the next century. The Donatist Church was emphatically to be the Church of Cyprian.

The fourth century opened with the Great Persecution. Its comparatively short duration in the West (303–305) was offset by its severity, especially in North Africa, in the aftermath of Maximian’s fourth edict in the spring of 304.¹¹ Whereas

⁴ *Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum*, 3: *Et nos religiosi sumus et simplex est religio nostra, et iuramus per genium domni nostri imperatoris et pro salute eius supplicamus, quod et uos quoque facere debetis.*

⁵ *Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum*, 6: *Speratus dixit: ‘Ego imperium huius seculi non cognosco ...’*

⁶ *Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum*, 15: *Nartzalus dixit: ‘Hodie martyres in caelis sumus, Deo gratias’.*

⁷ Tertullian, *Ad Martyras*, V. Buhlart (ed.), CSEL, 76 (Vienna, 1957), 3: *Inprimis ergo, benedicti, nolite contristare spiritum sanctum [Ephesians 4:30] qui vobiscum introiit carcerem.*

⁸ Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, A. Reifferscheid and G. Wissowa (eds), CSEL, 20 (Vienna, 1890), 30.

⁹ Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, 29: *Ad martyrum palmas gloriare.*

¹⁰ Cyprian, *Ep.*, 13.1, in W. Hartel (ed.), CSEL, 3 (Vienna, 1868): *In gaudio communi [at the confessors’ steadfastness] maior est episcopi portio.*

¹¹ Eusebius, *HE.*, VIII.6.10, singles out ‘Africa and the race of Moors’, as having suffered persecution as severe as that in the Thebaid and Egypt.

the three earlier edicts in 303 had concentrated on the clergy, the fourth edict had required everyone to sacrifice to the gods on pain of death for refusal. The *dies thurificationis* ('day of incense-burning') was long remembered, as shown from a Numidian inscription set up many years later, around the end of the century.¹² In addition, the names of 34 martyrs who 'suffered under the divine laws of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian' were preserved on a stone balustrade in the apse of the church at Haidra (Ammaedara) in south-east Tunisia.¹³

Many of these martyrs were to remain unregarded. The Great Persecution, however, was to produce others whose fame was to be extraordinarily long-lived within North Africa. Chief among these were the Abitinians, 47 Christians from the small town of Abitina in western Tunisia.¹⁴ They had been arrested by the authorities towards the end of 303 while holding a forbidden service, though their bishop, Fundanus had given way and surrendered at least some of his church's Scriptures. The Abitinians were imprisoned in Carthage where, far from being welcomed and sustained by their fellow-Christians, they claimed that they had been denied food usually supplied by visitors, at the orders of the Archdeacon, Caecilian, and added that the latter had allowed the use of whips by armed men to keep visitors to the prison away.¹⁵ The confessors themselves defied the Proconsul Anulinus at a hearing before him on 12 February 304. More significantly, they met in an informal council and solemnly decreed that anyone who communicated with a *traditor* (a cleric who had surrendered the Scriptures or other possessions of his church) would be unfit to share in the joys of Paradise. The *traditores* themselves were condemned to the everlasting flames of Hell.¹⁶ Rejection of Caecilian was complete.

Other confessors were also remembered. At Thuburbo Maius, Maxima, Donatilla and Secunda became the 'Sacred Three', their martyrdoms being recorded in literature in the fourth and early fifth centuries, and on stone in the Byzantine period.¹⁷ Crispina, daughter of a well-connected family in Thagora, was brought before Anulinus at Theveste on 5 December 304. She resisted every form of persuasion to sacrifice 'to all our gods for the welfare of the emperors', and was

¹² *CIL* VIII. 19353 and compare Optatus, *De Schismate Donatistarum*, C. Ziwsa (ed.), CSEL, 26 (Vienna, 1893), III.81.

¹³ *Qui persecutionem Diocletiani et Maximiani divinis legibus passi sunt*. The balustrade is illustrated and the literature discussed by Y. Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae: le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IVe au VIIe siècle* (Paris-Rome, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 105-15.

¹⁴ On these martyrs see Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford, 1952), 8-10.

¹⁵ *Acta Saturnini*, in J. P. Migne (ed.), PL, 8 (Paris, 1844), 17.

¹⁶ *Acta Saturnini*, 18. From now on, the compiler claimed, the 'Holy Church follows the Martyrs and detests the *traditores* as hateful traitors.' In general, see P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne. Depuis les origines jusqu'à l'invasion Arabe* (Paris, 1905-27), vol. 3, pp. 140-47.

¹⁷ On stone at Testour associated with Stefanus and HENCHIR ER ROUIS (Byzantine); in the early fifth century commemorated by Augustine, *Sermo*, 345.6. Augustine's reference to *Feminarum martyrum Tuburbitanarum* can only be to Maxima and her confessions.

executed, perhaps with five companions.¹⁸ As Eusebius of Caesarea asserts, the persecution, though relatively short, could be compared in severity with that suffered in Egypt and was decisive in the memory of the Church.¹⁹

The election of Caecilian as Bishop of Carthage in 311 led to an open schism in the North African Church. The underlying friction between those who were prepared to live under the imperial system so long as Christians were left in peace, and those who, like Tertullian, regarded the state as an alien and hostile body regardless of the conversion of Constantine, now came into the open. Caecilian's opponents in Carthage, supported by a strong presence of Numidian bishops led by their primate Secundus of Tigisis, refused to accept him as bishop. Instead, they held a Council in 312 which condemned Caecilian on the grounds that one of his consecrators had been a *traditor*.²⁰ During 313, Donatus, bishop of Casae Nigrae, a settlement on the edge of the Sahara, became leader of the opposition which had separated itself from Caecilian and which was to be labelled as the 'Donatist' Church. Donatus retained leadership of his Church and the bishopric of Carthage until his death in exile in 355.

The rest of Christendom – not least Rome – supported Caecilian. In North Africa, however, the Donatists gained the upper hand, which they held until the end of the century, despite the Emperor Constans' attempted enforcement of unity from 347 to 362. They continued the tradition of the greater part of the North African Church in previous centuries of being 'The Church of the Martyrs'. Martyrdom remained the highest ideal to which the Christian could aspire. As late as 400, Petilian, Donatist bishop of Constantine, reminded his clergy in a circular letter which denounced Catholics in unmeasured terms:

Therefore, I say, that He [Christ] ordained that we should undergo death for the faith, which each man should do for the communion of the Church. For Christianity makes progress by the deaths of its followers. For if death were feared by the faithful, no man would be found to live with perfect faith . . .²¹

Petilian supports this statement by quoting John 12: 'Except a corn of wheat fall in the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.'²²

¹⁸ Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire*, vol. 3. pp. 159–61; See Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, vol. 1, Notice 57, pp. 123–28, although Duval does not discuss the possibility of the great church and martyrdom at Tebessa being a Donatist pilgrimage centre.

¹⁹ see above, n. 11.

²⁰ Frend, *The Donatist Church*, pp. 18–21 (account of Secundus of Tisigis' Numidian Council).

²¹ Petilian quoted by Augustine, *Contra Litteras Petiliani Libri Tres*, M. Petschenig (ed.), CSEL, 52 (Leipzig, 1909), II.89: *Ergo, inquam, mortem pro fide subeundam constituit quam cuiquam pro communione faciendam. christianis enim mortibus proficit. nam nemo fidissimus viveret, si mors a fidelibus timeretur . . .* tr. by J.R. King in M. Dods (ed.), *The Works of Aurelius Augustine: A New Translation*, vol. 3: *Writings in Connection with the Donatist Controversy* (Edinburgh, 1872), p. 361.

²² Augustine, *Contra Litteras Petiliani*, II.196. Compare Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, E. Dekkers (ed.), CCSL, 1 (Turnhout, 1954), 50, for the same view two centuries earlier.

the breach. He preached a series of sermons devoted to the African Catholic version of the lives and deaths of North African martyrs, including Crispina, whose noble lineage he emphasized.³³ He also introduced the cult of some Italian martyrs, such as Protasius and Gervasius with whose rites he had become acquainted during his stay in Milan, from 383 to 386.³⁴ In 425, the deacon Heraclius (later Augustine's successor at Hippo) consecrated a church in honour of St. Stephen, whose relics Augustine's protégé Orosius had first brought back with him from the Holy Land some nine years earlier.³⁵ In the final few years before the Vandal invasion the cult spread rapidly throughout eastern North Africa.³⁶ It revealed that the North Africans, among whom Catholicism had made great progress since the proscription of Donatism,³⁷ were only too ready to welcome overseas martyrs as well as to integrate native martyrs into the Church's calendar.

During the period of the Vandal kingdom between 429 and 534, the tendency to import and honour overseas martyrs continued.³⁸ During these years, however, Rome was taking an increasing interest in the affairs of the Church in areas outside Vandal control. The long letter to Potentius, Bishop of Tipasa from Pope Leo in 448 enquiring into a list of disciplinary issues arising in the Church in Mauretania, paralleled an increasing progress in the cult of specifically Roman martyrs, especially in Mauretania Sitifensis.³⁹ In Setif itself, a stone tablet recorded the deposition on 3 August 452 of the relics of the deacon Laurence, martyred on 6 August 258 (perhaps a slightly inaccurate celebration of his *natale*).⁴⁰ Laurence and Hippolytus (d.235) appear on two inscriptions found on two other sites between Setif and Constantine. In Numidia the same development was taking place. At Ain Zirara, Laurence and Hippolytus were associated with an array of martyrs that included the Apostles Peter and Paul, Pope Xystus, martyred at the same time as Laurence in 258, the Scillitan martyrs, and Leontius, bishop of Hippo who had been

³³ Augustine, *Sermo.*, 325, 326, 328, 329. *Sermo*, 345 is devoted to Crispina who is also celebrated in Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, D.E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont (eds), CCSL, 38–40 (Turnhout, 1956), 113, 120 and 137.

³⁴ Augustine, *Sermo.*, 286 and also *De Civ. Dei.*, XXII.8.7.

³⁵ Augustine, *Sermo.*, 318 preached at the dedication of the relics by Heraclius, and cf. *Sermo.*, 356.7.

³⁶ On the arrival of the relics at Hippo, see Augustine, *Sermo.*, 317 and 318. For discussion of the popularity of the cult, see Duval, *Loca sanctorum*, vol. 2, pp. 624–32.

³⁷ For instance, at the small town of Aba in Mauretania, Augustine and his colleagues could write to Bishop Novatus of their pleasure that 'all the basilicas had been handed over to the Catholic Church and, the entire multitude (of Christians) had returned rapidly to the peace of Christ and unity'. Augustine, *Ep.* 28*, in J. Divjak (ed.), CSEL, 88 (Vienna, 1981), pp. 133–4.

³⁸ On the development of martyr cults in response to the events of 483–84, see Chapter 13 by Danuta Shanzer in the present volume.

³⁹ Leo, *Ep.* 12, in J. P. Migne (ed.), PL, 54 (Paris, 1846), cols 645–56.

⁴⁰ Duval. *Loca sanctorum*, vol. 1, pp. 306–10; W. H. C. Frend, 'North African and Byzantine Saints in Byzantine North Africa', in *Romanité et cité chrétienne: permanences et mutations, integration et exclusion du 1. au 6. siècle. Mélanges en honneur d'Yvette Duval* (Paris, 2000), pp. 319–33 at 322–3.

the foremost North African martyrs, Perpetua, Felicitas and their companions, in the form of a chapel housing a finely engraved inscription cut on smooth grey marble, each line flanked by a cross recording their martyrdoms.⁴⁶ Beyond the walls of Carthage, other, earlier North African martyrs were honoured by reproducing inscriptions on mosaics that were as near as possible to the original text of dedications to their memory. Thus, at Uppenna, in eastern Tunisia, though the new Byzantine church involved the alteration and enlargement of the earlier fourth-century building, part of the text of a dedication to the Apostles Peter and Paul and the Abitinian martyrs was preserved. The new inscription in the Byzantine church copied the old literally.⁴⁷ At Haidra there was a still more striking example. In fulfilment of a vow, a high official named Marcellus laid a mosaic in the church of Candidus which was an exact copy of the inscription on the balustrade of the earlier church, commemorating the names of the thirty-four martyrs executed during the Great Persecution. North African martyrs were to be given their due place in the Byzantine hierarchy of saints.

The text of the Haidra mosaic inscription is reproduced below:

HAIDRA

BYZANTINE MOSAIC

[now lost]

Gloriosissimis beatissimis(que) m[artyri]
 b(us) qui persecutionem Diocletiani et Max[imiani]
 divinis legib(us) passi sunt qu[o]rum corpor[a]
 hoc loco deposita aput Do(mi)n(um) in aeternum
 m[a]nent. His cui divinitus inspirare hoc in animo.
 dignitatus est nominorum benerand
 aq(ue) corpora anacletis lapideis cum
 ermulis adq(ue) mensa conclusit. Unde divine cle
 mentie cum suis omnib(us) Marcellus illustris
 gratias agit, qui memoriae martyrum me-
 rita exoptata vota complevit. Felix
 semper vivat qui intentissime leger-it
 felicior qui Deo omnipotenti per Chr(is)
 t(um) eius tota fide crediderit +

The names of 34 martyrs were listed in two columns on either side of the text, framed in red mosaic. There may also have been a crown at the base of the mosaic.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Now in the Byrsa Museum. Illustrated by Duval, *Loca sanctorum*, vol. 1, figs. 11a and 11b, pp. 14–15. The inscription adds traces of another martyr, Maiulus.

⁴⁷ The Byzantine basilica extended beyond the earlier basilica on the north side, and destroyed about two thirds of the original inscription. See Duval, *Loca sanctorum*, vol. 1, pp. 80–82 for a plan and illustration.

⁴⁸ From the Church of Candidus; reported by L. Poinssot, *BCTH* (1934–35), pp. 70–81. Also reproduced by Duval, *Loca sanctorum*, vol. 1, p. 108, the copy is taken from her text.

The restoration of earlier Christian sites continued in the countryside. An inscription carved on a square column base found near Guelma (Calama) records the existence of 'a former altar' at that spot.⁴⁹ One of the great difficulties encountered by archaeologists from Stéphane Gsell to Louis Leschi was how to differentiate sixth-century from fourth-century chapels. During this period of excavation (1890–1940) the lack of firm guides through the correlation of pottery and small finds from these sites rendered such distinction practically impossible if there were no inscriptions.

Apart from restoring the names and memories of the early North African martyrs, the clergy of the Byzantine period sought to integrate them into a common worship with the saints of Justinian's empire. Yvette Duval's magisterial work *Loca Sanctorum Africae* provides numerous examples. The most striking comes from an agricultural settlement at Henchir Akhrib in south-western Numidia.⁵⁰ In the sixth century this village formed part of the diocese of Nicivibus (Nigaous), 14 km to the north-east, and enjoyed active relations with its bishop, Columbus. A small church recorded by Stéphane Gsell in 1903 and 1904 produced an astonishing array of relics, the deposit of most of them being accurately recorded at the time of the ceremony.⁵¹ Two large reliquaries had been deposited, one beneath the altar below a ciborium, the other in the left-hand side aisle abreast of the altar. On 11 September 543 the presbyter Floridus deposited the relics of Julian of Antioch.⁵² He also inscribed another dedication on the base of a pot, to Laurence (of Rome or Carthage) in fulfilment of a vow (*votum in Christo reddidi*).⁵³ Floridus had also made a dedication to Julian at another neighbouring site of Ain Guigba when Emilian was bishop of Nicivibus.⁵⁴

These ceremonies were followed by a more elaborate dedication of relics performed by Bishop Columbus, 47 years later. The priest at that time was Donatus, and at his urging (*per instantia*) the deposition of the relics of Julian and Laurence 'with their companions' took place 'in the reign of Tiberius, in the fifth year of the fourteenth indiction on the day before the nones of October', that is 6 October 580.

⁴⁹ S. Gsell, *Inscriptions latine de l'Algérie* (Paris, 1922), p. 428: *Hic memoria pristini altaris*.

⁵⁰ S. Gsell, 'La chapelle chrétienne d'Hr Akrib', *MEFR*, 23 (1903), pp. 1–25 and (1904) p. 365; Jaubert, 'Anciens évêchés', pp. 141–4 and Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, vol. 1, pp. 259–77. Laurence in this case could be either the deacon Laurence, martyred in Rome on 6 Aug 258 whose cult had spread to Constantinople, or a North African martyr. For two similar churches at Sila, 32 km south-east of Constantine, which commemorated both North African and Byzantine saints, and in one of which a dedication was dated 6 May 585, see F. Logeart and A. Berthier, *Receuil de Constantine*, 63 (1935–36), pp. 235–85. Seen by the writer in 1939.

⁵¹ Duval, *Loca sanctorum*, vol. 1, pp. 260–274. Columbus may have been the powerful bishop mentioned in Gregory I's correspondence, *Ep.*, II.46 and III.47, 48, in D. Norberg (ed.), *CCSL*, 140 (Turnhout, 1982).

⁵² Duval, *Loca sanctorum*, vol. 1, pp. 273–76.

⁵³ Illustrated in Duval, *Loca sanctorum*, vol. 1, p. 268.

⁵⁴ Duval, *Loca sanctorum*, vol. 1, pp. 277–81.

Chapter 13

Intentions and Audiences: History, Hagiography, Martyrdom, and Confession in Victor of Vita's *Historia Persecutionis*

Danuta Shanzer

Our image of Vandal Africa is heavily coloured by the different sources and different voices that predominate at different periods under different rulers. One can contrast the panegyric of a Florentinus¹ with a sermon of Quodvultdeus.² Then there are the (to some extent) neglected voices of figures such as Martianus Capella, who can be dated and localized in Vandal Africa, but who does not attest its barbarian overlords in any specific way.³ A variety of sources, some local (for example, Victor of Tunnuna), some external (for example, Procopius) speak of and about the Vandals, but to their detriment, the group lacked a Gregory of Tours or a Bede, or indeed any sort of sympathetic 'national' historiographer to set out the achievements and intentions of their greatest ruler, the redoubtable Geiseric, let alone those of one of his lesser and more dysfunctional descendants.⁴ One could, with a little imagination, reconstruct what a writer with Gregory's talents and grim sense of humour⁵ might have made of Huneric's bamboozling of the Nicene bishops over the Vandal succession.⁶ It is not that there is a substantial dearth of sources in comparison to other kingdoms, but that there is no systematic account of the origins of the Vandals to pique the attention of the lovers of mythical history,

¹ Florentinus, *In laudem regis* (sc. Thrasamundi): AL R.376 (S.371).

² Quodvultdeus, *Sermo de tempore barbarico*, 1 and 2, R. Braun (ed.), CCSL 60, (Turnhout, 1974), pp. 423–37 and 473–86. For more on this text see P. P. Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques* (Paris, 1964), vol. 3, pp. 126–9.

³ D. Shanzer, *A Philosophical and Literary Commentary on Martianus Capella's De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii, Book 1* (Berkeley, CA, 1986), pp. 5–8 and 17–21.

⁴ Courtois, *Victor de Vita*, p. 3 misleadingly claims that Victor's role for the Vandals was equivalent to that of Gregory of Tours for the Franks and Procopius for the Byzantines.

⁵ D. Shanzer, 'Laughter and Humour in the Early Medieval Latin West', in G. Halsall (ed.), *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2002). One thinks in particular of the clear 'diptych' historiography of Clovis, where a Constantinian conversion model clearly gives way to the ruthless and cunning strong and murderous king at Greg. Tur., *LH.*, II.40–42 with all of its jokes and serial killings.

⁶ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.17–20.

nor a historiographer of genius who focalized his narrative on Africa from the Vandal point of view. Victor of Vita and his *Historia Persecutionis* thus perforce, and in some sense unhappily, play a key role in the historiography of the Vandals. For Victor painted the darkest picture of all, and his work is inevitably quarried for grim details of the Vandal invasion as well as for the persecutions of Geiseric and Huneric.⁷ Vandal atrocities, the imprisonment of Nicenes by Vandals and Mauri, acquired a sinister twentieth-century political colouring, when a modern French scholar used the phrase, 'camp de concentration', when discussing Huneric's persecution.⁸ In this chapter I propose first a critical re-examination of various current assumptions regarding Victor's date and profile as an historian and then a re-evaluation of his agenda as a hagiographer in Vandal Africa.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE *HISTORIA PERSECUTIONIS*

The *Historia* (hereafter '*HP*') is our only narrative source for the reigns of Huneric and Geiseric, and the only true historiography to emerge from Vandal Africa. Its author, one Victor, is unattested elsewhere. All that survives is his name and *patria*.⁹ His biographical details and profile must be deduced from internal evidence alone. The evidence used to date the work is tricky, so it might be as useful to summarize the facts again:¹⁰

- The last event covered by the main text of the *HP*: the great drought, famine, and plague, can be dated to summer of 484, not long before Huneric's death.
- The final paragraph (*HP.*, III.71), which given Victor's normal concern with stylistic gravity, has the air of a messy, though all-too-clearly-motivated, interpolation, must have been added after Huneric's death in December 484.
- Other passages, such as *HP.*, II.12 and *HP.*, II.17 that refer to the brevity of Huneric's reign and the failure of the succession he envisaged, must likewise have been written after he perished.
- The opening words of the *HP.*, I.1: *sexagesimus nunc agitur annus*, must have been written in 488 (if interpreted literally as an inclusive reckoning from the Vandals' embarkation for Africa in 429) or in a window from 487 to 489, if they are a conveniently round number.¹¹
- The whole tenor of the *HP* makes little sense *unless* it was written during a time of persecution. The Jeremiah-like peroration (*HP.*, III.61–70) is

⁷ A. Schwarcz, 'Bedeutung und Textüberlieferung der "*Historia Persecutionis Africanae Provinciae*" des Victor von Vita', in A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter (eds), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 1994), p. 116 for its importance as a source.

⁸ Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques*, p. 191 'd'un réalisme frappant'. Also p. 134.

⁹ S. Lancel, *Histoire de la persécution vandale en Afrique* (Paris, 2002), p. 3.

¹⁰ For the details see most recently Lancel, *Histoire de la persécution vandale en Afrique*, pp. 9–12.

¹¹ Lancel, *Histoire de la persécution vandale en Afrique*, p. 10 for the options.

particularly pointless without a real audience and a real historical occasion in the evil days of Huneric.¹²

- Yet *HP.*, III.40, which tells how Carthage now enjoys the twelve child-choristers in circumstances that suggest religious peace, cannot have been written under Huneric.

The simplest hypothesis is that the work was indeed written during the persecution under Huneric, but that it was updated after his death. While *HP.*, III.71 on the death of Huneric hardly approximates Victor's idea of how such a history should have ended, the other passages that suggest a date after Huneric's death are well integrated and likely to be his own writing. The only exception is the tale of the 12 child choristers (*HP.*, III.34 and 3.38–40), which has been awkwardly bisected by the torture of Muritta (*HP.*, III.34–37).¹³ This confusion in the text could have been caused by mis-transmission, and, one would suspect, a non-apparent lacuna or else a non-authorial interpolation. The customary conclusion, namely that the work was touched up and completed shortly after the end of Huneric's reign, seems correct.¹⁴ The *HP* thus presents contradictory evidence about its date. Only a complicated two-step hypothesis will explain the evidence. Victor's work was, thus, in one sense, out-dated even as he completed it. During Huneric's persecution he depicted, and (one may suspect) even created, an atmosphere of true biblical emergency, his text larded with fulfilment citations¹⁵ and psalmic horrors.¹⁶ But after the worst was over, he updated his work to reflect happier times. It still had a purpose however, as we shall see.

Andreas Schwarcz advocates a later dating to 489, and I would like to take this opportunity to discuss a number of issues that arise in connection with it, because they can shed some new light on both Victor and the *HP*. Schwarcz argues that the man who allegedly motivated Victor's composition must be Eugenius of Carthage,¹⁷ who first returned from exile in 487 and was inaccessible

¹² For political and religious détente under Gunthamund, see Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques*, p. 194. Also Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 300.

¹³ See Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.34 where there is a problem about who is being beaten. The *lectores*? (As suggested by *HP.*, III.40: *subdi iterum fustibus iubent, quos iam ante paucissimos dies variis verberibus dissipaverant*.) The *universi* who offer their backs to the whips at *HP.*, III.38? Or should the text read *caederetur*, so Muritta would be the one who exhibited *libertas* when beaten? The story then cuts back incoherently to the children, on their way to exile with the Carthaginian Church, being kidnapped or hijacked by a Vandal called Teucharius (who was once a lector and then presumably apostatized). In the process they are beaten a second time.

¹⁴ At Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.17 Victor notes that Huneric's reign was short.

¹⁵ For example, Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.7.22; I.7.23, and so on.

¹⁶ For *Psalms*, see Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.61–70 in particular. Also Courtois, *Victor De Vita*, p. 71.

¹⁷ Accepting the arguments of Courtois, *Victor de Vita*, pp. 21–22 that Eugenius' name is Greek and that he is most likely to be an Easterner who moved to Carthage and was comparatively unknown when he became bishop in 480–81. But here again, even if this is the

before then.¹⁸ *HP.*, I.1: *Sexagesimus annus* is used to date the *HP* to 489.¹⁹ Schwarcz also suggests that Victor's account of Huneric's succession manoeuvres and killings of his relatives at *HP.*, II.12 was really aimed at Gunthamund.²⁰

I shall consider Schwarcz's second point first. It is unclear why this account of Huneric's murders of Theoderic 4 and the children of Genton, to insure the succession of Hilderic, required Gunthamund as its audience. If Victor's intention has been to curry favour or assign blame for dynastic purges, either could have been done more effectively.²¹ Victor's narrative instead makes it explicit that to him (whatever it may reveal to us) this is no more than a rhetorical argument *a maiore*: if this is how badly Huneric treated his own relatives it is no surprise that he treated Nicenes even worse.²²

The first point, namely the identification of the dedicatee as Eugenius of Carthage, requires more extensive treatment. But it too is unlikely for the following reasons. First of all the *anonymus* alleged dedicatee is in no way obviously profiled as a bishop in the prologue, let alone as a miracle-worker²³ and confessor.²⁴ The honorific used is *venerabilitas studii tui*;²⁵ the dedicatee is above all learned: he has been *eruditus* by one Diadocus. Yet he is very much the *discipulus* of his teacher; his biblical models are Timothy and Luke the doctor – hence a follower, hardly likely to be the astute and active leader of the Carthaginian Church.²⁶ Furthermore, had the text been written after Eugenius' return from exile in 487, why was this notable fact not made more explicit in the revised text?²⁷ Courtois assumed that Eugenius must be a foreigner, and hence Greek, on the basis of his name and of *HP.*, II.6.²⁸ He thus decided that the now Greek Eugenius was the obvious person to be a

case, it does not make Eugenius necessarily the dedicatee of the *HP*. R. Pitkäranta, *Studien zum Latein des Victor Vitensis* (Helsinki, 1978), p. 15 likewise accepted the identification with Eugenius.

¹⁸ Schwarcz, 'Bedeutung und Textüberlieferung der "*Historia Persecutionis*"', pp. 117–18.

¹⁹ Schwarcz, 'Bedeutung und Textüberlieferung der "*Historia Persecutionis*"', p. 118.

²⁰ Schwarcz, 'Bedeutung und Textüberlieferung der "*Historia Persecutionis*"', p. 118.

²¹ Schwarcz, 'Bedeutung und Textüberlieferung der "*Historia Persecutionis*"', p. 118, however suggests that Gunthamund is not mentioned at all because the political situation was still too sensitive. But this seems to be arguing that absence signifies presence, so to speak.

²² Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.14.

²³ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.47.

²⁴ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.43–4.

²⁵ Although is frequently used of bishops, E. Jerg, *Vir Venerabilis. Untersuchungen zur Titulatur der Bischöfe in den Ausserkirchlichen Texten der Spätantike als Beitrag zur Deutung ihrer öffentlichen Stellung* (Vienna, 1970) gives no examples of *venerabilitas* as an episcopal honorific.

²⁶ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.6 has a panegyric tone.

²⁷ Victor might have been expected to allude to Eugenius' return in various places, especially *HP.*, III.43–44, had he really written after 387.

²⁸ *Porro ille vir dei, sacerdos Eugenius, coepit per conversationem operum bonorum venerabilis et reverendus haberi, etiam ab eis qui foris sunt, et ita esse omnibus gratus, ut, si fas esset, animam suam pro eodem universos ponere delectaret. . . .* Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.8: *Sed cum fama eius esset ubique celebris atque manifesta . . .*

student of 'Diadochus' who was assumed to be from Epirus. But Victor seems to be emphasizing the radiation of Eugenius' reputation *outwards* from Carthage, so that even people outside (*etiam ... eis qui foris sunt*) revered him. His reputation eventually spreads everywhere.²⁹ There is nothing here to indicate that Eugenius came from abroad. Nothing in the text thus requires that Eugenius be the dedicatee of the *HP*. And if one goes back to Marrou, who originally formulated the suggestion in association with Courtois, it is clear that the point was hardly proved. A wedge was inserted, and Eugenius somehow got associated with the prologue of the *HP*.³⁰

But even once Eugenius is rightly uncoupled from the prologue to the *HP*, the text still remains problematic and repays closer examination. Here is a working translation:

1. In the past ancient writers never ceased making assiduous inquiries about, and explaining, what had happened, be it well or otherwise in provinces, places, or regions in order that they might sharpen the pen of their intellects on the material and give fragrant flowers of learning, offered in voluntary generosity by the basketful, to those who did not know the story, and they saw to it that nothing remained hidden to the world that had been done in one part of it. But, inflated by the pride of the love of the world, they strove that the glory of their lofty position might be disseminated to their credit far and wide.

2. But the Venerability of Your Learning, wishing to weave a history, inquires with a similar fervour, but with a different sort of love: they in order that they might be praised in the world, you in order that you may appear famous in the future and may say: 'My soul will be praised in the Lord: let the gentle hear and rejoice.' You will be able <to do this>, as you wished, because you have received every excellent gift and every perfect present from heaven, given that you have been educated by so great a bishop and so much to be praised with every sort of laud, the blessed Diadocus, the monuments of whose Catholic teachings are as many in number as the shining stars. And it is enough for you to have equalled the learning of your teacher, because it is enough for a student to be like his master.

3. I see another Timothy educated in sacred writings since infancy, not to mention a Luke, lofty and agile among others, by profession a doctor, the disciple of Paul.

4. For I submitting my obedient neck to the order of the one commanding me, will try to indicate briefly and gradually what happened in Africa when the Arians were running riot, and, like a rustic worker, I shall gather gold from hidden caves in my weary arms. I shall not hesitate to hand the precious matter³¹ over, still dirty and alloyed, to be tested by fire at judgement of a master-craftsman, who could strike gold *solidi* for currency.

²⁹ Vict. Vit., *HP*., II.8: *Sed cum fama eius esset ubique celebris atque manifesta*.

³⁰ H.-I. Marrou, 'Diadoque de Photike et Victor de Vita', *Revue des études anciennes*, 45 (1943), p. 228, guessing that to identify the 'destinataire' one did not have to go further than the African Church and Eugenius. At the bottom of the page one finds, 'Admettons que ce soit bien Eugène'.

³¹ For this postclassical use of *species* to mean 'valuable piece' or 'precious object', see A. Blaise and H. Chirat, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens* (Strasbourg, 1954).

This prologue caused comment over a century ago. Ebert considered the first three paragraphs to be an interpolation.³² Petschenig condemned the whole as inauthentic.³³ Marrou raised some of the substantive difficulties they had noticed only to dismiss them. He reaffirmed that the prologue was written by the author, Victor, to accompany the book, *not a text addressed to the author as a first reading of the first two paragraphs might suggest*. (My emphasis).

The last point requires some attention. If we take all four paragraphs of the prologue as a unity, then we have to assume that Victor, a historian, was addressing someone else who had both commissioned the *HP* (*iubentis imperio*) and himself wanted to write a history: *historiam texere cupiens*.³⁴ While this is possible, one wonders whether entities (in this case historians) are not being multiplied beyond strict necessity. Does one really need to posit *two*?³⁵

I would suggest a different approach to elicit a more unprejudiced response. I have separated the text of what is called the prologue of the *HP* into its four conventionally-numbered sections. Sections 1 and 4 have obvious generic affiliations with standard Latin and Christian Latin prose prefaces, for example, Priamel about predecessors: (what earlier secular historians did contrasted to the author's non-secular agenda),³⁶ *topoi* of flowers,³⁷ injunction and obedience,³⁸ raw material,³⁹ and rusticity.⁴⁰

The second and third sections, however, are somewhat different. They begin with a contrast, *at*, and move into the second person, addressing someone using an honorific: *venerabilitas studii tui*. The person addressed is clearly someone who wishes to write a history (*historiam texere cupiens*), *not*, as we have seen, someone wishing a history to be written. The other details of his profile have been discussed above. The second paragraph also seems to show some continuity with the first in that it likewise contrasts the differing motivations of classical and Christian historiographers.

³² A. Ebert, *Geschichte der christlich-lateinischen Literatur von ihren Anfängen bis zum Zeitalter Karls des Grossen*, vol. 1, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Literatur des Mittelalters im Abendlande* (Leipzig, 1874), p. 436, n. 1: 'Die schwülstige Vorrede aber ist, mag es sich mit ihr verhalten wie es will, bis auf den letzten Satz: Ego namque etc. das Werk eines Andern, ein Citat aus einem Brief.'

³³ M. Petschenig, 'Die Handschriftliche Überlieferung des Victor von Vita', *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historische Klasse der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 96 (Vienna, 1880), pp. 727–32.

³⁴ If it had been the conventional request that a history be written by Victor, he would have written *ut historia texeretur* or *historiam texi cupiens*.

³⁵ This is what Lancel, *Histoire de la persécution vandale en Afrique*, p. 96 is doing. He reads *artifici iudicio ignis examinandam*, 'To the craftsman to be tested by ordeal by fire'. Halm reads *artificis iudicio igni examinandam*. 'To/at the judgement of the craftsman to be tested in the fire'.

³⁶ T. Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces: Studies in Literary Conventions*, *Studia Latina Stockholmiensia* (Stockholm, 1964), pp. 151–2.

³⁷ Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, pp. 151–2.

³⁸ Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, pp. 118–20 for compulsion and command.

³⁹ Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, p. 152.

⁴⁰ Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, p. 139.

A cold, hard look at paragraphs 2 and 3 suggests that they indeed make better sense as words addressed by someone *to* the author, Victor; the one who indeed wished to write a history, and could reasonably have been described as learned man and a subscriber to the agenda of the Christian historiographer. This leaves two options: either they are, as Halm in his apparatus said, the words of another speaker brought in by Victor to address him – hence Halm's punctuation with quotation marks around paragraphs 2 and 3. Or else they are part of another text of some sort – presumably a letter from the original recipient and commissioner of the *HP* to Victor, written upon receipt of the text.⁴¹

I incline towards the latter opinion, although it is unclear how the text happened to be inserted in the middle of the *HP*'s prologue.⁴² The words *simili quidem fervore, dispari tamen amore*, suggest that the writer had read the opening of the prologue and was responding to it.⁴³ Halm's suggestion, positing in effect another voice in the prologue is ingenious.⁴⁴ After all, the prologue to Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* has neatly been interpreted as speaking in several voices, including that of the book.⁴⁵ But would an author constructing a self-address have inserted an honorific such as *venerabilitas studii tui*? And would he have inserted the panegyric material about Diadochus and told himself that it was enough that he be like his teacher? The comparisons to Timothy and Luke are likewise a bit much for self-fashioned praise, while perfectly appropriate as kind words from a superior.⁴⁶ Ebert divided the material into paragraphs 1–3 (which he considered to be an interpolation) and paragraph 4 (which he considered the opening of the *HP*).⁴⁷ But what Latin text begins with the words, *Ego namque*? Furthermore, as noted above, paragraphs 1 and 4 both contain familiar prologue *topoi*.⁴⁸ The obvious conclusion is that they are indeed a prologue to this history.

⁴¹ As suggested by Ebert, *Geschichte der christlich-lateinischen Literatur*, p. 436, n. 1, although he included paragraph 1 as part of the letter.

⁴² The reception-letter may have been docketed with a copy of *HP* and the mistakenly inserted into the preface by a scribe at a pre-archetypal stage.

⁴³ Petschenig, 'Die handschriftliche Überlieferung des Victor von Vita', p. 730 however thinks that only the person who wrote paragraph 1 could have continued with *at ... dicas*.

⁴⁴ *pace* Petschenig, 'Die handschriftliche Überlieferung des Victor von Vita', p. 730, who raises objections such as the need for an *at vero inquis* to indicate the second speaker. But one has only to consider the problems involved in dividing the words of Persius, *Saturae*, W. V. Clausen (ed.), *Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis* (Oxford, 1992), 1.1–12 to see that things were not cut and dried, and that Romans desperately needed the quotation-mark.

⁴⁵ S. J. Harrison, 'The Speaking Book: The Prologue to Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*', *Classical Quarterly*, 40 (1990), pp. 507–13.

⁴⁶ Petschenig, 'Die handschriftliche Überlieferung des Victor von Vita', p. 730 rightly notes the prologue-writer's customary modesty elsewhere. It is also worth drawing attention to the use of *tua* rather than *vestra*. This communication is horizontal or downwards, not upwards.

⁴⁷ Ebert, *Geschichte der christlich-lateinischen Literatur*, p. 436.

⁴⁸ For some *topoi*, see Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, nn. 36–40 above. Petschenig, 'Die handschriftliche Überlieferung des Victor von Vita', pp. 730–31 notes the commonalities about historical writing in the first paragraph.

If my assessment of the nature of paragraphs 2 and 3 of the prologue is correct, an important consequence ensues – namely that the writer profiled in them is Victor himself,⁴⁹ not the mysterious dedicatee: a man learned in scripture and possibly, in some sense, a medical man, like Luke *arte medicus*. The latter expertise might explain the nature of some of his descriptions of tortured and the exiled confessors.⁵⁰ Thus it is now *Victor himself* who needs to be associated with the mysterious Diadochus, not the addressee.

HISTORY AND HAGIOGRAPHY

As we have seen, Victor was not without literary pretensions,⁵¹ and his work has several parents in the historiographical tradition. The most obvious one is Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.⁵² There would appear to be other possible relations, particularly as regards tone and exultation over demises of notable villains, namely to the sort of tract or broadside represented by Lactantius'

⁴⁹ Petschenig, 'Die handschriftliche Überlieferung des Victor von Vita', pp. 731–2 throws the baby out with the bath-water, arguing: (1) that the only known Diadochus is the one from Photike, but (2) his output was not large, so this could not be him. (3) Diadochus would have to be an African bishop to be in contact with Victor, but (4) none such is attested. Therefore this, the only fact in the prologue, is a fake. Hence the prologue should be condemned in its entirety.

⁵⁰ Note his mention of doctors helping Deogratias at Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.26; his depiction of the Holy Spirit curing the confessors at *HP.*, I.34; his interest in the after-effects of scalping at *HP.*, II.9; the after-effects of torture on the nuns at *HP.*, II.25; Felix's paralysis at *HP.*, II.26; Victor's intercession for Felix and assessment of his health at *HP.*, II.27; poison from scorpions at *HP.*, II.37; the paralysis of Eugenius at *HP.*, III.43; heads' positions distorted on shoulders by torture at *HP.*, III.31; tear ducts at *HP.*, III.50. Special mention of the hagiographical tale of the wife and children of the doctor Liberatus at *HP.*, III.50, described as *venerabilis* (as was Victor in the prologue).

⁵¹ See Pitkäranta, *Studien zum Latein des Victor Vitensis*, pp. 17–18. Take also such features as the semi-philosophical vocabulary used at *HP.*, I.7: *a meatu prorsus naturali usque ad arcem capitis dissipabant*, repeated in part at *HP.*, III.31: *arcem cerebri*. The idea can be found in Cic., *Tusc.*, 1.10.20: *Rationem in capite, sicut in arce posuit*, echoed by Lactantius, *Liber De Opificio Dei*, J. P. Migne (ed.), PL, 7 (Paris, 1844), 8: *Eius prope divina mens, ... in summo capite collocata, tanquam in arce sublimis speculatur omnia, et contuetur*.

⁵² Mentioned by Victor at *HP.*, III.60 along with its translation by Rufinus. Pitkäranta, *Studien zum Latein des Victor Vitensis*, p. 17, n. 63 notes a few more possible verbal parallels. See also P. Wynn, 'Rufinus of Aquileia's Ecclesiastical History and Victor of Vita's History of the Vandal Persecution', *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 41 (1990), pp. 187–98. Note however that there are no verbal parallels between the Rufinus, *HE.*, XI.5 and the episode of the daughter of the Bishop of Zurita at *HP.*, II.30 discussed by Wynn at p. 192. There seems to me to be no reason to suggest that the episode in Victor is fabricated. It, after all, is the one with the odd circumstantial details, for example, the identity of the woman as the daughter of a known bishop and the identification of the child as a grandson, rather than as (apparently) a son. In Rufinus the woman encourages martyrdom, while in Victor, more significantly, the grandmother wants to prevent the child from being rebaptized.

was Courtois, and can devote our attention to more mundane matters.⁶¹ Instead we should ask ourselves why a historian-cum-hagiographer⁶² set down these graphic accounts of maltreatment, torture, and execution in this way. Most critics have done little more than register horror at the brutalities described in what Courtois memorably called Victor's 'jardin des supplices'.⁶³

Events have audiences, and are, in a sense, observed texts. A martyrdom was witnessed by potential voluntary martyrs in the audience,⁶⁴ the faithful, the wavering, the lapsed, and others of different persuasions. Each would register a different response.⁶⁵ Hagiography in the form of a passion provided comparable written texts, both to commemorate and to recreate the effect of the original martyrdom at second hand. As the audience of a written text, voluntary martyrs were largely irrelevant, the lapsed hard to reach, and others only occasional readers, but the faithful and the waverers could both be expected to read or hear the hagiographer's words. They were the target audience, the sympathetic eyes and ears.⁶⁶

To the target audience corresponded an intended message. In advertisements its promulgation is fairly easy. But once a more complicated narrative is involved, the narrator's filter – fortunately for the modern historian – could fail to work as effectively as he hoped. Christian ecclesiastical history is told from the winners' point of view: heretics' views were suppressed or misrepresented, tergiversators customarily swept under the rug.⁶⁷ This was only natural: one wanted to present one's best face. But it is important for the interpreter to try to get behind the façade by reading between the lines with an eye to the different reading-audiences of a work such as the *HP*.⁶⁸ I therefore propose a systematic and cynical look at some of Victor's narratives. Whether they are literally true or not is less important than what we can deduce about his hagiographical agenda from a closer examination in context.

⁶¹ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 74.

⁶² The attribution of the *Passio Septem Monachorum* to Victor of Vita has been debated. See now Lancel, *Histoire de la persécution vandale en Afrique*, pp. 69–71 with whom I am in agreement that it is the pastiche of a 'Victorizer' who worked from and imitated the touched-up (and interpolated) *HP*.

⁶³ See Courtois, *Victor de Vita*, p. 75 for this striking phrase.

⁶⁴ R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1987), pp. 443–4. G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 3.

⁶⁵ For distress caused by failures of the weak, see Eusebius, *HE.*, V.1.11. For joy at their eventual confession, see *HE.*, V.1.48.

⁶⁶ For the importance of recapturing the lapsed, see Eusebius, *HE.*, V.2.6. Tenderness was required to rescue them from the jaws of the beast.

⁶⁷ For an example of the gradual elimination of mass apostasy in a legend see the longer Latin recension of Eusebius' *Martyrs of Palestine* in H. Delehay, 'St. Romain, Martyre D'Antioche', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 50 (1932), p. 244: *cum iis egit qui timore permoti in peccatum lapsi erant diabolicae superstitionis* and also Eusebius of Emesa's *Homily* *ibid* p. 246: *enim iam multos milites cecidisse ecclesiae*, compared with Eusebius, *HE.*, VIII.12.2–6 and Prudent., *Perist.*, X. 56–65.

⁶⁸ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 24–41 for example nicely disentangles Huneric's succession-problems from his religious policy, as narrated by Victor of Vita in *HP.*, II.12–13.

Sequential stories send a cumulative message. *HP.*, I.43–6 describes the sufferings of one Armogas, a servant of Theoderic,⁶⁹ Geiseric's son, at the hands of the Vandals. Cords that had been twisted tight around his forehead broke like spider-webs and his tormentors had to use hempen ropes. These likewise proved ineffectual, and the Vandals resorted to *suspendium* upside-down by one foot. Finally his master ordered him to be decapitated, but was swayed by an Arian priest, Iucundus: 'If you kill him by the sword, the Romans will begin to proclaim him a martyr.'⁷⁰ They sent him to dig ditches in Byzacena, and thence to a worse fate as a cowherd near Carthage. God saw fit to reveal to him his coming death, and he asked to be buried under a carob tree, where, when the time came, a splendid marble sarcophagus was found for the occasion.⁷¹

The story is notable because it self-consciously raises the question of martyrdom, only to foil our expectations. The devious Arian is represented as speaking up against it for tactical reasons. The Nicene narrator could reasonably be suspected of inventing the story to explain why Armogas failed to achieve the martyr's crown. Armogas was a confessor not a martyr, a point emphasized through repetition of the word.⁷² But confessor or not, he is granted a prophetic vision that reinforces his special status.

The tale of Masculas, the archimime, follows immediately in *HP.*, I.47. This, likewise, is a story of martyrdom avoided. Geiseric, to avoid making him a glorious martyr, cunningly made arrangements to slay him with the sword if he flinched, but to spare him if he deported himself bravely. Masculas was passed the test and emerged a confessor. Here the *invidia* of the persecutor is made explicit, and a confessor emerges as a brave second best.⁷³ One is left speculating about the significance of the new confessor's occupation and the piquancy of putting an actor, who had no doubt shammed death on stage, through such a potentially 'fatal charade'.⁷⁴

Both of these stories depict barbarian cunning that fails to do what might be expected of it in order to frustrate Nicene longing for martyrdom. This theme reappears in Victor's account of the early years of Huneric's reign in *HP.*, II.1: *qui in primordia regni, ut habet subtilitas barbarorum, coepit mitius et moderatius agere, et maxime circa religionem nostram*. The stories of Armogas and Masculas also suggest that the Vandals were aware of the theology of martyrdom and

⁶⁹ *PLRE*, Theodericus 4.

⁷⁰ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.44. Iucundus went far with his Machiavellian reasoning, becoming a bishop by *HP.*, II.13, but he perished, burned to death by Huneric.

⁷¹ Cf. Greg. Tur., *GM*, 50 for the invention of the sarcophagus of Benignus of Dijon by Gregory of Langres. One could also cite Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.17–22 which must be dependent on an archive of contemporary visions.

⁷² Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.46: *confessor venerabilis and comes bonae confessionis*.

⁷³ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.47: *Etsi martyrem invidus hostis noluit facere, confessorem tamen nostrum non potuit violare*. Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 292.

⁷⁴ The phrase is taken from K. M. Coleman, 'Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments', *JRS*, 80 (1990), pp. 44–73.

Victor knew how martyrdoms ran. Many of his stories exhibit clear martyr 'scripts' that recall the days of pagan persecution of Christians.⁸⁰ A small child in *HP.*, III.49 cries out as best he can: '*Christianus sum, Christianus sum, per sanctum Stephanum Christianus sum.*'⁸¹ Likewise confessors in *HP.*, II.28: '*Christiani sumus, catholici sumus, trinitatem unum deum inviolabilem confitemur,*' not to mention the Nicene bishops at *HP.*, III.17. The situation had changed by the 470s, and being a Christian versus being a pagan was no longer the issue, but the martyr's litany and response were constants.⁸² One has only to compare Donatist texts, such as the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, to see passages where martyrs' claims of '*Christianus sum*' were impatiently brushed aside by the presiding official as beside the point.⁸³ No doubt there would have been coaching in the correct responses, and '*Christianus sum*' or '*Christiani sumus*' was seen as the right pre-emptive and proactive response to any question.⁸⁴

But four of Victor's narratives are oddly ambiguous. In *HP.*, III.22 Dionysia 'herself now a martyr steels others for martyrdom' – including her own son.⁸⁵ But she was not apparently killed, for she survives to bury her son, Maioricus, *in sua domo* (*HP.*, III.24). Victoria is tortured and stands fast despite the pleas of husband and children, but the dénouement is narrated in an ambivalent fashion. 'When even those who were torturing her saw that she was already dead, her shoulders dislocated by the prolonged suspension, they laid her down quite entirely lifeless.'⁸⁶ This sounds as if her torturers left her for dead. But a sentence later we are told that a virgin stood by her and healed her limbs. So again, it would seem, another confessor.

A similar ambiguity surrounds *HP.*, III.28 that announces *certamina martyrum*. Here two brothers compete in standing fast under torture and finally are rejected in

⁸⁰ Hagiographical transcripts, that is, revised trial records, such as the *Acta Scillitanorum*, eventually generated 'scripts' for righteous Christian behaviour. For *acta* see R. A. Coles, *Reports of Proceedings in Papyri*, vol. 4, *Papyrologica Bruxellensia* (Brussels, 1966). D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA, 1999), p. 94 speaks of martyrdom as 'a "discourse", as a practice of dying for God and of talking about it.'

⁸¹ Also Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.51: *Christiani sumus*. The child's cry is particularly interesting, because it suggests that he had an idea of Stephen's status as protomartyr and no doubt had been influenced by Stephen's translation-cult in Africa. On which see the *De Miraculis S. Stephani*, J. P. Migne (ed.), *PL*, 41 (Paris, 1841), 83ff.

⁸² Moorhead, *Victor of Vita*, p. xiv. See Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 441 for the 'simple persistent response, which was admirable even if it irritated others and had only to be repeated to attain its end'.

⁸³ For *Christianus sum*, brushed aside see *Passio Saturnini, Dativi, Felicis, Ampelii, et ceterorum*, in Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri (ed.), 'Note Agiografiche', *Studi e Testi*, 65 (Rome 1935), pp. 49–71 with prefatory materials at pp. 3–46.

⁸⁴ For examples of the original script, see Rufinus, *HE.*, V.1.19 and 21.

⁸⁵ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.23: *ipsa iam martyr alios ad martyrium confortabat*, and *filium solidans velociter martyrem fecit*.

⁸⁶ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.26: *Quam cum iam continuatione suspendii avulsis humeris etiam qui cruciabant conspicerent mortuam, deposuerunt prorsus omni parte exanimam*.

In Victor's narrative far more confessors than martyrs appear,⁹⁸ even though he would clearly have liked to leave us with the impression that martyrdom was rife. Some confessors are indeed rightly so designated: Dagila in *HP.*, III.33 who was beaten and relegated to the desert, the two Vandals of *HP.*, III.38, the clerics of the church of Carthage at *HP.*, III.39, Eugenius at *HP.*, III.44, and Habetdeus at *HP.*, III.45–6. But terminological inflation occurs too. For example, the hardships of the confessors are called *passiones*,⁹⁹ and while one confessor-bishop yearns for greater contact with the other confessors, in the same passage Victor calls the Nicenes on the death march *martyres*.¹⁰⁰

We have already noted the misleading importation of the discourse of pagan persecution of Christians to the fifth century. But there may be more than anachronism to the reiterated words '*Christianus sum*'. There is a real sense in the *HP* that theological debate could centre upon names or designations. Arians were unhappy when Nicenes called themselves 'Catholics', preferring to call their Roman subjects *homousians*.¹⁰¹ Arians regarded themselves as the true Christians.¹⁰² Nicenes would on occasion deny Arians the status of Christians, even while (paradoxically) referring to their *heresy*.¹⁰³ Victor would have called this sort of contest over nomenclature *usurpatio*.¹⁰⁴ Read this way, the Nicene '*Christianus sum*' could sound like a pre-emptive provocation or challenge.¹⁰⁵

Continuities thus can be observed between the African Church under the Vandals and the African Church of the Great Persecution and the Donatist controversy with regard to scripts of martyrdom.¹⁰⁶ But that is not all. Popular theological polemic mattered too. Arius, a Libyan, promulgated his *Thalia* in part in verse and that he wrote religious songs for different workplaces.¹⁰⁷ Subsequent African Christians

⁹⁸ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 298 notes that no mathematical calculation can be done, but that there were no doubt very many confessors.

⁹⁹ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.33.

¹⁰⁰ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.33. Within this passage, Victor twice uses the term *martyres*.

¹⁰¹ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.56 and III.1: *graviterque ferentes, quare nomine nostro catholicos dixerimus*. See *HP.*, III.12 for Arian use of *Homousian*.

¹⁰² Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.39.

¹⁰³ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.48: *daemonica vociferatione Christianos suos ipsi pariter vocabant*.

¹⁰⁴ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.56, for Cyrila's *usurpatio* of the name 'patriarch'. Also *HP.*, II.13: *episcopum suae religionis, nomine lucundum, quem patriarcham vocitabant*.

¹⁰⁵ Note that at Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.46 the Arian Antonius triumphantly tells Habetdeus: *noster Christianus effectus es*.

¹⁰⁶ Continuities with specifically African religious history such as martyrdom and combativeness mentioned by Moorhead, *Victor of Vita*, pp. xiii–xv. But note also other features such as the collecting of visions at Vict. Vit., *HP.*, II.17–22. The documentation and preservation of the visions of the *Passio Perpetuae*, H. Musurillo (ed.), *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 106–31 and of the *De Miraculis Stephani*, J. P. Migne (ed.), PL, 41 (Paris, 1845) provide parallels.

¹⁰⁷ For the *Thalia*, see Athanasius, *De Synodis*, J. P. Migne (ed.), PG, 26 (Paris, 1857), 15 and *Oratio contra Arianos*, J. P. Migne (ed.), PG, 26 (Paris, 1857), 1.5. For Arius' popular shanties, and so on, see Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Joseph Bidez (ed.), GCS (Berlin, 1981), II.2.

were quick to take advantage of verse polemic. We have Augustine's own abecedarian psalm against the Donatists, and under Thrasamund, Fulgentius of Ruspe would create a similar rhymed item, complete with refrain.¹⁰⁸ Such verse could encourage, but it could also 'dis'. It is possible that we see an echo of this sort of Nicene 'rap' in *HP.*, III.46, an odd piece of rhymed prose spoken by the forcibly rebaptized Habetdeus to his Arian oppressor.¹⁰⁹

It should be no surprise that in this world where words could be hijacked and theological opponents taunted in rhyme, Victor too is guilty of verbal distortion in his treatment of martyrs and confessors. It was a fine thing, when introducing a new cult, to be able to upgrade from confessor to martyr.¹¹⁰ But here reading between the lines, we see a situation where there were many more confessors than martyrs. Courtois, after all, had pointed out that the evidence for persecution under Geiseric is slim.¹¹¹ The crown of martyrdom would have been better than the title of confessor, but facts were facts.¹¹² Victor's stories that showcase fortitude under torture aim to glorify the steadfast, but they also would have reached another audience, those likely to lapse, for whom such tales of constancy might provide valuable stiffening.¹¹³

When considering apostasy, one also needs to look at these narratives from a Vandal point of view. While the Vandals, according to Victor, employed coercion, including edicts of persecution,¹¹⁴ forced rebaptism¹¹⁵ and torture to induce Nicenes to apostatize to Arianism, it is also clear that some initial approaches, even those recounted by this hostile narrator, involved carrots, not just sticks.¹¹⁶ Reading between the lines in the *HP* we discover some examples of working contact between Arians and Nicenes, for example, Sebastianus,¹¹⁷ the trusted Victorianus,¹¹⁸ the Nicenes in Vandal households,¹¹⁹ the Nicenes in barbarian

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, *Psalmus contra partem Donati*, and Fulgentius, *Psalmus*, in Walther Bulst (ed.), *Hymni Latini Antiquissimi Lxxv. Psalmi iii*, (Heidelberg: 1956), pp. 147–55; For the psalm, see also Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁹ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, III.46, starting at *Illa est, impie Antoni, mortis damnatio, ubi voluntatis tenetur adsensio ... quod credo et credidi, clamando defendi ... catenis vinxisti et oris ianuam obpilasti ... confeci ... transmisi*.

¹¹⁰ See *De Miraculis S. Stephani*, 41.83 for a nun's vision in which the initial (mistaken) acclamation of Stephen's relics as 'Confessor Christi' is corrected to *ecce habetis martyrem*.

¹¹¹ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 292.

¹¹² Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, p. 74 overstates the case in asserting that Augustine's condemnation of suicide in *De Civ. Dei*, 1. caused the final repudiation of voluntary martyrdom. Victor of Vita shows that its theology, if not the ready opportunities for it, was alive and well.

¹¹³ For martyrdom, hagiography and the lapsed, see above nn. 64 and 65.

¹¹⁴ Vict Vit., *HP.*, III.12.

¹¹⁵ For Vandal use of bishops to promote conversions, see Mathisen, 'Barbarian Bishops and the Churches 'in Barbaricis Gentibus' During Late Antiquity', p. 687.

¹¹⁶ E.g. Vict Vit., *HP.*, I.30, I.47, I.48, II.28 *blandis sermonibus*, III.29.

¹¹⁷ Vict Vit., *HP.*, I.19.

¹¹⁸ Vict Vit., *HP.*, III.27.

¹¹⁹ Vict Vit., *HP.*, I.30; *HP.*, III.13.

message that would not cease to be relevant once Thrasamund succeeded and persecution was renewed.¹⁴⁶ Thus regardless of whether the author of the *HP* knew this or not, a continuing readership, looking for inspiration and perhaps a sense that the worst *had* passed, was thus assured.

Andrew Cain draws an identikit picture of a lost work, parallel in part to Victor's *HP*, whose influence can be detected in Gregory of Tours' accounts of Eugenius.

¹⁴⁶ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 301–4; Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques*, pp. 195–9. Eugenius of Carthage survived a relegation under Huneric (*HP.*, III.42) and exile (ca. 502 under Thrasamund) to die at Albi in 505 and be buried as a 'martyr under Huneric'. See Greg. Tur., *GM.*, 57.

Chapter 14

Disputing the End of African Christianity

Mark A. Handley

The fate of Christianity and of the Christian Church after the Arab conquests is one of the more vexed questions in the study of early medieval North Africa. Following Maitland, who in his *Domesday Book and Beyond* tried to write history backwards,¹ I hope to try to change the way we see Roman, Vandal and Byzantine North Africa by looking backwards from Islamic North Africa. To a certain extent this is a tried and tested way of seeing the region in this period. For many scholars it is the rapid end of Christianity in early Islamic Africa which provides the prism through which the earlier periods are seen. In this paper I want to suggest, not that the method is flawed, but simply that the prism needs changing.

For more than a century, explanations for why African Christianity came to an end in the wake of the Arab invasions have varied. Some have sought an explanation in the defeat of the Donatists at the Council of Carthage in 411. For others the problem was either the success of the Vandals in creating an Arian Church, that the Berbers were insufficiently Christianized, or that the tradition of dissent within African Christianity led to a situation whereby the African Church became isolated. The relative lack of a rural Christianity has also been blamed, as has the supposedly incessant persecution suffered by the majority Church in Africa from the fourth century through to the debates over Monothelitism in the mid-seventh. More recently it has been suggested that the alienation of the Latin-speaking population from the increasingly Graecized Church may serve as partial explanation, or alternatively that a lack of priests outside Africa Proconsularis was the cause.

The desperation with which an explanation has been sought is slightly unsettling. In its most extreme cases one is hard put to stop the words 'Eurocentric' or even 'Christo-centric' from entering one's head. Clearly some scholars find the idea that a right-thinking fully Christian individual could convert to Islam almost impossible to accept. There must have been something deeply wrong with African Christianity, and with North Africa itself, to allow such conversions to take place. As one recent scholar has put it, 'the Arab conquest ... rapidly led to the eclipse of African Christianity. There was something rotten in the state of Late Roman Africa.'² In

¹ F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1897).

² J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford, 2001), p. 101.

some respects it is similar to the way in which the Near East is sometimes portrayed on the eve of the Arab conquests; destitute, impoverished, divided, ripe.³ Why is it so difficult to accept that the rise of Islam did not need any help?

What I want to do with this paper is throw a spanner in the works. I want to pinpoint some of the problems with those arguments that have tried to explain the rapid demise of Christianity in North Africa. The final section of the paper will attempt to look at the implications of this. If the African Church did not disappear in the maelstrom of Arab invasion, but rather continued for over five hundred years, then much work on Christianity in Roman, Vandal, Berber and Byzantine Africa will have to be rethought. Moreover, we will find ourselves in a position where it is no longer acceptable automatically to date final phases of churches to around 650, or to assume that no Christian epitaph was erected after this date. In short many certainties begin to look increasingly untenable and the need for radical rethinking begins to appear unavoidable.

EXPLAINING THE 'DECLINE'

Perhaps the most vociferous exponent of the need to explain the demise of African Christianity has been W. H. C. Frend; another of the contributors to this volume. Through his ground-breaking work on the Donatist Church, Frend sought to explain the end of African Christianity. For Frend the Donatists were the genuine article – the true expression of African Christianity.⁴ As recently stated: 'The destruction of ... [Donatist] society, by a combination of Augustinian rhetoric and argument, and imperial legislation, contributed in no little way to the ultimate destruction of Christian and Roman north Africa.'⁵ Catholic Christianity, on the other hand, he suggests was Rome-inspired and thus could not possibly hope to survive in Africa.

To blame Augustine, who died in 429, when even the most pessimistic visions of the collapse of African Christianity place it more than two centuries later, does, on the face of it, seem somewhat unfair. Moreover, Frend's argument requires that the anti-Donatist Council of Carthage in 411 was utterly decisive in destroying the Donatists.⁶ Recent articles by Shaw and Tilley on this council provide little support for this thinking.⁷ The composition of the Donatist *Liber Genealogus* in Vandal

³ For example in M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (London, 1996), pp. 81–2, 88–9.

⁴ W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford, 1952).

⁵ W. H. C. Frend, 'Donatus *'paene totam Africam decepit'* How?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 48.4 (1997), pp. 611–27, at p. 627.

⁶ For the acts of the council see *Gesta Conlationis Carthaginensis Anno 411*, S. Lancel (ed.), CCSL, 149A (Turnhout, 1974).

⁷ See B. D. Shaw, 'African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions and 'Donatists'', in M. R. Greenshields and T. A. Robinson (eds), *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Religious Movements: Discipline and Dissent* (Lampeter, 1992), pp. 5–34 and M. Tilley, 'Dilatory Donatists or Procrastinating Catholics: The Trial at the Conference of Carthage', *Church History*, 60 (1991), pp. 7–19.

From a sample of some 4500 Christian inscriptions I have found 47 nuns, nine monks and three abbots,¹⁷ while the *Prosopographie Chrétienne* includes nine abbots, 44 nuns and 47 monks.¹⁸ There is no shortage of evidence for monasticism and thus I see no reason to accept that an absence of monasticism in North Africa contributed to the end of North African Christianity.

In an article from 1960, C. J. Speel argued that Vandal Arianism was the reason for the rapid conversion of many Africans from Christianity to Islam.¹⁹ For Speel, the Vandals had overseen large-scale conversions, albeit under pressure, from Catholicism to Arianism, and this change of allegiance was not undone during the period of Byzantine occupation. Speel went on to argue that there were 'theological similarities' between Islam and Arianism and that the success of the Vandal Arian Church was thus responsible for the demise of Christianity in North Africa.²⁰ Needless to say, I find this argument difficult to accept. While there is evidence that some Catholics did convert to Arianism under pressure from the Vandals,²¹ to argue that Catholicism had to be re-introduced under the Byzantines is a nonsense. The *Life of Fulgentius*,²² the Albertini Tablets,²³ the Ostraka from Bir

"in barbaricis gentibus" during Late Antiquity', *Speculum*, 72 (1997), pp. 664–95. For other Arian bishops in North Africa see *PCBE* 1, Barbas, Antonius 4, Cyrila, Maximinus 10, Maximinus 11, and Pinta. On Catholic monasteries see also Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.4, 32–5, II.24, III.41.

¹⁷ For the nuns see *ILCV*, nos 1108, 1442, 1442A, 1442Aadn, 1683–4adn, 1685adn, 1686A, 1702, 1711, 1713adn, 2032, 2052, 2538, 3247; *CIL VIII*, no. 21570, *ILTun*, nos 1695–8, 1701; *IAM II*, nos 16, 21, 28; *ICK I*, nos 87, 243, 347; *ICK II*, nos 97a, 97b, 293, 584, 641a; *ICK III*, nos 78, 152, 200, 244, 352, 613; *Altava*, no. 199; *Mactar*, no. II.4; *Haïdra*, nos 101, 103; *AE* (1993), nos 1710b, 1727, and P-A. Février, 'Remarques sur les inscriptions funéraires datées de Maurétanie Césarienne orientale (IIe–Ve siècle)', *MEFR*, 76 (1964), pp. 105–72, no. 392(ii). For the monks see *ILCV*, nos 1456, 1456adn, 1661, 1821, *Mactar*, nos X.66, 69, XII.18, *ICK II*, no. 19, *AE* (1993), no. 1710a, for the abbots see *ILCV*, nos 1649, 1649adn, and *ILTun*, no. 1156.

¹⁸ *PCBE* 1.

¹⁹ C. J. Speel, 'The Disappearance of Christianity from North Africa in the Wake of the Rise of Islam', *Church History*, 29 (1960), pp. 379–97.

²⁰ Speel, 'The Disappearance of Christianity', most clearly stated at pp. 379 and 383.

²¹ Greg. Tur., *LH.*, II.3. On Gregory's information regarding the Arian kingdoms see now J. Moorhead, 'Gregory of Tours and the Arian Kingdoms', *Studi Medievali*, 36.2 (1995), pp. 903–15. See also Fulgentius, *Ep.*, 9, referring to one Fastidiosus who had been a Catholic monk and priest before becoming an Arian. An Arian sermon by this Fastidiosus is included within Fulgentius' letter. For an English translation see R. B. Eno (tr.), *Fulgentius. Selected Works* (Washington, DC, 1997), pp. 384–423.

²² Ferrandus, *VF.*, 1, where Fulgentius, a Catholic, is appointed *procurator*, and 7, where an Arian bishop who was a friend of the family (!) lent Fulgentius his support after he had been beaten by an over-zealous Arian priest.

²³ Courtois et al., *Tablettes Albertini*, and the recent studies of D. J. Mattingly, 'Olive Cultivation and the Albertini Tablets', *L'Africa romana*, 6 (1989), pp. 403–15; R. B. Hitchner, 'Historical Texts and Archaeological Context in Roman North Africa: The Albertini Tablets and the Kasserine Survey', in D. B. Small (ed.), *Methods in the Mediterranean: Historical and Archaeological Views on Texts and Archaeology*, Mnemosyne Suppl. 135 (Leiden, 1995), pp. 124–42; and F. Vitrone, 'Aspetti controversi e dati economico-sociali nelle Tavolete Albertini', *Romano-Barbarica*, 13 (1994–95), pp. 235–58.

The literary and religious sources for Byzantine Africa in the seventh century are almost all in Greek.³² It is claimed that the province of North Africa produced no Latin writers after the outpourings provoked by the Three Chapters controversy. The seventh century provided no heirs to Augustine, Corippus, Facundus, Ferrandus, or either of the Victors.³³ For Cameron this takes on great significance. The sub-text of her argument is that the Graecization of government, literature and serious religious debate left the Latin Church of North Africa weakened.³⁴ That Latin literature ended is a significant pointer to a lack of engagement with the wider Christian world, a sign of a lack of vitality and hence an indicator of a weakness which helps explain the imminent demise of the Christian Church.

Many aspects of this argument are convincing and provide a sophisticated critique of the sources for seventh-century Africa, such as the *Life*, debates and works of Maximus the Confessor or the *Doctrina Jacobi*. As an argument for the weakness of the Christian Church, however, it relies on silence – on the lack of indigenous Latin sources. This silence may be suggestive of a Church in trouble, but it may equally be suggestive of little more than source survival. The survival of African sources is often threadbare at best. The *Anthologia Latina* only survives fully in one manuscript,³⁵ as does the *Iohannis* of Corippus,³⁶ and a number of the works of Dracontius are lost.³⁷ Perhaps the late sixth- and seventh-century ‘silence’ from Latin North Africa should not be made to bear the weight that Cameron attempts to place on it. In any case it is likely that the Abbot Hadrian, well known to Anglo-Saxonists as the companion of Theodore of Tarsus and co-founder of the school of Canterbury in the 660s, was not from Cyrenaica, as recently claimed, but from more westerly areas of North Africa.³⁸ The education and works of this man,

³² See the excellent survey in A. Cameron, ‘Byzantine Africa: The Literary Evidence’, pp. 29–62, to which can be added her ‘The Byzantine Reconquest of North Africa and the Impact of Greek Culture’, pp. 153–65, and G. Dagron and V. Déroche, ‘Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati’, *Travaux et Mémoires*, 11 (1991), pp. 18–273. Most inscriptions remained in Latin.

³³ Relatively little work has been done on Ferrandus and Facundus but see R. B. Eno, ‘Doctrinal Authority in the African Ecclesiology of the Sixth Century: Ferrandus and Facundus’, *Revue des études Augustiniennes*, 22.1–2 (1976), pp. 95–113, and ‘Ferrandus and Facundus on Doctrinal Authority’, *Studia Patristica*, 15 (1984), pp. 29–6.

³⁴ A. Cameron, ‘The Byzantine Reconquest of North Africa and the Impact of Greek Culture’, p. 165. Cameron’s choice of word is ‘tempered’.

³⁵ Codex Salamasianus, Paris B.N. lat. 10318.

³⁶ The so-called *Trivultianus* of the fourteenth century. See the useful discussion of the manuscripts in G. W. Shea, *The Iohannis or De Bellis Libycis of Flavius Cresconius Corippus* (Lampeter, 1998), pp. 4–5.

³⁷ See Andy Merrills, Chapter 7 of the present volume, and D. F. Bright, ‘The Chronology of the Poems of Dracontius’, *Classica et Medievalia*, 50 (1999), pp. 193–206.

³⁸ B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge (eds), *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 84–5. The localization to Cyrenaica is based on Hadrian’s knowledge of Greek, (see note 39 below), and the use of the word *Libia* to localize a personal observation on a bird in the Biblical commentaries. However, as is clear from the works of Averil Cameron, Greek was widely known in North Africa, and indeed both Augustine’s *Confessions* and the *Life of Fulgentius of Ruspe* attest to education in Greek. Moreover, ‘Libya’ was the word used by Byzantine-period authors such as Procopius,

described by Bede as equally versed in Latin and Greek,³⁹ and the Biblical commentaries of whom were discovered by Bernard Bischoff last century,⁴⁰ would suggest a Latin culture within seventh-century North Africa more vigorous than is usually allowed.

In articles published in late 1970s and mid-1980s by Botha and Schoen, the failure of African Christianity was explained with reference to the insufficient Christianization of the Berbers.⁴¹ It must be said that there is some evidence for this, both archaeological and literary. Attention has recently been drawn to the site of Ghirza in Tripolitania. This was an important temple site which provides evidence of use up to the sixth century.⁴² It has also been noted that only two churches have been found in this area.⁴³ This evidence clearly indicates a continuation of non-Christian religious practices. That Ghirza may also have been an important centre of the Leuathae confederation only strengthens this case.⁴⁴

Some literary evidence for the continuance of traditional Berber religion comes from Corippus' *Iohannis*. Not only does he state that some Berber tribes were particularly attached to an oracle of Ammon, but also that Berbers worshipped the bull-god Gurzil.⁴⁵ The similarity of the god-name Gurzil and the temple-name Ghirza has led some to suggest that this was in fact the god worshipped at that site.

Evagrius Scholasticus and Corippus to denote the more westerly sections of North Africa. See Procopius, *BV.*, *passim*, J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (eds), *Evagrius. Ecclesiastical History* (London, 1898), II.7, p. 54, and Corippus, *Ioh.*, *passim*. Lapidge's attribution of a Cyrenaican origin for Hadrian does not stand up to scrutiny.

³⁹ B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (ed. and tr.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), IV.1, p. 328: 'Abbot Hadrian, a man of African race (*vir natione Afir*) and well versed in the Holy Scriptures, trained both in monastic and ecclesiastical ways and equally skilled in the Greek and Latin tongues'. Translation taken from Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries*, p. 83.

⁴⁰ The discovery was made in 1936, but announced in B. Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte in der Geschichte der lateinische Bibelexegese', in his *Mittelalterliche Studien* (Stuttgart, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 205–73. The commentaries themselves have now been fully published in Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries*.

⁴¹ C. J. Botha, 'The Extinction of the Church in North Africa', *Journal of Theology for South Africa*, 57 (1986), pp. 24–32, and U. Schoen, 'The Death of a Church: Remarks on the Presumed Reasons for the Disappearance of the 'First Church' in North West Africa', *Theological Review* (Beirut), 1 (1979), pp. 3–20.

⁴² O. Brogan and D. Smith, *Ghirza: A Libyan Settlement in the Roman Period* (Tripoli, 1984), pp. 80–88, and M. Brett and E. Fentress, *The Berbers* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 66–7.

⁴³ Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, p. 293, n. 46, following A. Di Vita, 'La diffusione del Cristianesimo nell'interno della Tripolitania attraverso i monumenti e sue sopravvivenze nella Tripolitania araba', *Quaderni di archeologia della Libia*, 5 (1967), pp. 121–42, especially p. 123 for a map, and pp. 126–7 for plans of these churches.

⁴⁴ Brogan and Smith, *Ghirza*, p. 231. Also see A. F. Elmayer, 'The Libyan God Gurzil in a Neo-Punic Inscription from Tripolitania', *Libyan Studies*, 13 (1982), pp. 49–50, and for the continuing worship of Saturn see D. Riggs, 'The Continuity of Paganism between the Cities and Countryside of Late Roman Africa', in T. S. Burns and J. W. Eadie (eds), *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity* (East Lansing, MI, 2000), pp. 285–300.

⁴⁵ Corippus, *Ioh.*, 2.109, 150, 5.493.

Corippus' testimony, however, is problematic. As Averil Cameron has recently pointed out, his account of the oracle of Ammon is largely made up of literary borrowings from Lucan.⁴⁶ Moreover, Procopius in his *Buildings* makes explicit reference to this Oracle, stating that Justinian had put an end to this practice, had converted the local people to Christianity and provided them with a Church dedicated to the *Theotokos*.⁴⁷ It is perfectly possible, therefore, that Corippus included reference to the oracle of Ammon as part of his programme for drawing a dichotomy between the pious, Christian Byzantines and the perfidious pagan Berbers. Indeed Cameron has argued that all of Corippus' evidence on Berber paganism should be seen in this light, and accordingly taken with a generous pinch of salt.⁴⁸

What other evidence can be mustered for the religious practices of the Berbers in the Vandal and Byzantine periods? Victor of Vita certainly recounts stories of the conversion of large numbers of Berbers to Catholicism,⁴⁹ as does Ferrandus in his *Life of Fulgentius*.⁵⁰ Indeed Federico Torreira has recently argued both that the Vandal period witnessed a concerted programme of missionary work by African Catholics towards the Berbers, and that this work was remarkably successful. Torreira argues that the *Notitia provinciarum et civitatum Africae* associated with the Hunerican council of 484 provides solid evidence of this.⁵¹ When compared to the Council of Carthage in 411, the number of bishops from the Mauretaniae would seem to have risen from 62 to over 160 in the space of around 70 years.⁵² Even if these figures fail to demonstrate a real increase in bishoprics or expansion of Christianity between 411 and 484, the *Notitia* does provide evidence for over 160 bishoprics in areas not controlled by the Vandals and no longer controlled by Rome. In other words these bishoprics operated within the new Berber kingdoms of North Africa.⁵³ Torreira also notes the quite large numbers of Christian epitaphs found in such westerly towns as Pomaria, Numerus Syrorum, Altava and Volubilis.⁵⁴ From

⁴⁶ A. Cameron, 'Corippus' *Iohannis*: Epic of Byzantine Africa', in F. Cairns (ed.), *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar*, 4 (Liverpool, 1984), pp. 173–4.

⁴⁷ Procopius, *Aed.*, VI.2.15–20.

⁴⁸ A. Cameron, 'Corippus' *Iohannis*', esp. pp. 173–4. Also see for Corippus, Y. Modéran, 'Corippe et l'occupation Byzantine de l'Afrique: pour une nouvelle lecture de la *Johannide*', *Ant. af.*, 22 (1986), pp. 195–212; J.-M. Lassère, 'La Byzacène meridionale au milieu du VI^e S. d'après la *Johannide* de Corippus', *Pallas*, 31 (1984), pp. 163–77.

⁴⁹ Vict. Vit., *HP.*, I.36.

⁵⁰ Ferrandus, *VF.*, 13.

⁵¹ F. M. B. Torreira, 'Le iglesia norteafricana y el problema de la cristianización de los pueblos indígenas en la época vándala', *L'Africa romana*, 7 (1990), pp. 375–91. The *Notitia provinciarum et civitatem Africae* from 484 has recently been printed in J.-L. Maier, *L'Episcopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine* (Rome, 1973), pp. 85–91.

⁵² Torreira, 'Le iglesia norteafricana', p. 389.

⁵³ See below, nn. 60–61, the study by Alan Rushworth in Chapter 4 of the present volume, and Y. Modéran, 'Koutzinas-Cusina: Recherches sur un Maure du VI^e siècle', *L'Africa romana*, 7 (1990), pp. 393–407.

⁵⁴ Torreira, 'Le iglesia norteafricana', pp. 382–83.

Pomaria there is a series of 23 dated inscriptions ranging from 417 to 651,⁵⁵ from Numerus Syrorum, there are 18 dated epitaphs from between 272 and 460,⁵⁶ from Altava there are more than 200 such inscriptions ranging from 302 to 599,⁵⁷ and from Volubilis there is a group of four Christian inscriptions dated to between 605 and 655.⁵⁸ Thus while we may doubt the extent to which this is evidence for Christianization of Berbers *during* the Vandal period, we can be in no doubt as to the plentiful evidence for Berber Christianity.⁵⁹

Although the evidence is less explicit, it is also worth mentioning that the Berber kingdoms attested under King Masuna and Emperor Masties are more than likely to have been Christian in character. Masuna is described in an inscription from Altava dated to 508 as 'king of the Moors and the Romans' and mention is made of his officials including Masguinus the prefect of Safar, Maximus the procurator of Altava and Ilder the procurator of Castra Severiana.⁶⁰ Further to the east in the Aures Mountains another inscription records the *imperator* Masties, who 'never broke faith with the Romans'. The inscription which includes a cross, says he had been *dux* for 67 years and emperor for 10.⁶¹ I would argue that the likelihood is that these two Berber kingdoms, so notably built on Roman models, had elites that were largely Christian.

Evidence is also forthcoming for successful conversions of Berber tribes during the Byzantine period, although it does come from an unlikely source. At the end of the sixth century the Spaniard John of Biclarum wrote a *Chronicle* celebrating the

⁵⁵ Pomaria inscriptions: *ILCV*, nos 3662, 3662A, 3667, 3667A, 3668, 3669, 3670, 3670A, 3670B, 3671, 3671A, 3671B, 3672, 3673, 3675, 3675adn, 3675A, 3675Aadn, 3676, 3677, 3679, 3679adn, for undated epitaphs see nos 394, 1609adn, 3674, 3674adn, 3675Aadn, 3675Aadn, 3677adn, 3678, 3679adn, 3681.

⁵⁶ *ILCV*, nos 390, 402, 406, 3682, 3683, 3684, 3685, 3686, 3686A, 3687, 3688, 3688A, 3689, 3691, 3691A, 3691B, 3691D, 4192A, and for undated epitaphs see nos 2865A, 2865Aadn, 3685adn, 3690, 3691C, 3691Cadn, 3691Cadn, 4192, 4192B.

⁵⁷ In M. Marcillet-Jaubert (ed.), *Les inscriptions d'Altava* (Aix-en-Provence, 1968).

⁵⁸ *IAM* 2 nos, 506, 603, 608, 619, and also the undated epitaphs *AE* (1987), nos. 1108, 1113.

⁵⁹ Also see P.-A. Février, 'Aux origines du christianisme en Maurétanie Césarienne', *MEFRA*, 98.2 (1986), pp. 767–809.

⁶⁰ *Altava*, no. 194. See G. Camps, 'Rex gentium Maurorum et Romanorum: Recherches sur les royaumes de Maurétanie des VI^e et VII^e siècles', *Ant. af.*, 20 (1984), pp. 183–218; P.-A. Février, 'Masuna et Masties', *Ant. af.*, 24 (1988), pp. 141–7; and most recently a new expansion has been suggested in C. Zuckerman, 'Építaphe d'un soldat africain d'Heraclius servant dans une unité indigène découverte à Constantinople', *Antiquité Tardive*, 6 (1998), pp. 377–382, at pp. 381–82.

⁶¹ See J. Desanges, 'À propos de Masties, *imperator* berbère et chrétien', *Ktema*, 21 (1996), pp. 183–8, and P. Morizot, 'Pour une nouvelle lecture de l'*elogium* de Masties', *Ant. af.*, 25 (1989), pp. 263–84, and the still useful discussion in B.H. Warmington, *The North African Provinces from Diocletian to the Vandal Conquest* (Cambridge, 1954), pp. 74–5. Warmington also discusses the inscription of Masuna from Altava. See also P. Grierson, 'Matasuntha or Mastinas: A Reattribution', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 19 (1959), pp. 119–30 for the coins of the Berber king Mastinas, minted in the name of Justinian using moneyers from Carthage.

THE SURVIVAL OF AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY?

The swift demise of Christianity necessitates a large-scale and rapid conversion to Islam. This may seem obvious, but recent work on early Islam makes this point problematic. If, for instance, both the Koran and the Hadith, as we have them, were products of the eighth or ninth century, then how was early 'Islam' defined?⁷² If, for much of the seventh century, Mohammad was portrayed as *a* prophet rather than *the* Prophet, again we face a problem with how exactly a 'conversion' to Islam might have happened.⁷³ Moreover, the earliest narratives of the Arab conquest of North Africa were produced in ninth-century Egypt with the specific intention of providing justification for the enslavement of Muslim Berbers. Contrary to Islamic law, this was justified on the grounds that the Berbers had back-tracked on their earliest 'submissions' to the Arabs.⁷⁴ The stories we have, therefore, of early Arab success and swift Berber submission, were written as *apologia* for a much later slave trade.⁷⁵ The word for submission in Arabic is *islam*. Whereas the triumphalist accounts of the conquest, and many modern scholars, have interpreted this word in a religious sense, it is increasingly accepted that this word need imply nothing more than political or military 'submission'.⁷⁶ Thus the evidence for early and widespread 'conversion' to Islam in North Africa, turns out to be nothing of the sort. A more up-to-date understanding of the nature of early Islam and its sources raises serious questions about the supposed conversion of the majority of the North African population.

The most significant counter to any argument about the 'end' of African Christianity comes from the work done by Arabists on the evidence for the Christian Church in Islamic North Africa.⁷⁷ The next section owes much to their work, and will discuss only some of the evidence which has been gathered.

⁷² See J. Wansborough, *Quranic Studies* (Oxford, 1977), and P. Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law. The origins of the Islamic patronate* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁷³ See the discussion in P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph. Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 24–9.

⁷⁴ M. Brett, 'The Arab Conquest and the Rise of Islam in North Africa', in J. D. Fage (ed.), *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 490–544 and R. Brunschvig, 'Ibn Abdal'hakam et la conquête de l'Afrique du Nord par les Arabes: étude critique', *Annales de l'Institut des Études Orientales*, 6 (1942–47), pp. 108–55.

⁷⁵ Also see E. Savage, 'Berbers and Blacks: Ibadi Slave Traffic in Eighth-century North Africa', *Journal of African History*, 33 (1992), pp. 351–68.

⁷⁶ Brett, 'The Arab Conquest', p. 512: '*islam* seems to have been employed as an instrument of government ... in little more than a political sense', also see E. Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, A Gateway to Paradise. The North African Response to the Arab Conquest. Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, 7 (Princeton, NJ, 1997), pp. 98–100. It should be noted that one very considerable problem with this last work is the assumption that all African Christians were Donatists. The most recent work she cites on Donatism is W. H. C. Frend's, *The Donatist Church*. Even a cursory acquaintance with the last 50 years of research would have saved her from this error.

⁷⁷ M. Talbi, 'Le Christianisme maghrébin de la conquête musulmane à sa disparition une tentative d'explication', in M. Gervers and R. J. Bikhazi (eds), *Conversion and Continuity*.

The Christian community of Tahart, the Ibadi capital in modern-day western Algeria, is one for which there is considerable evidence. Here Christians formed part of the Imam's court, they had their own church, were wealthy and involved in trade, they had a market, and one of their number Bakr ibn-al-Wahid was known as the 'defender of the City'. In the ninth century the Imam Aflah ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab had a bodyguard made up of Tahart's Christians. In the tenth century, when the Ibadis left Tahart for Warjla far to the south and east, the Christian population went with them.⁷⁸

Arab sources use a number of different terms to describe African Christians. One of these, which also seems to have an implication of Latin-speaking is *afariqa*. This term, and another, '*ajam*', first used to describe the Christians of seventh-century Africa, were widely used to describe Christian communities in towns such as Barqa, Gabes, Maqqara, Beja and Sousse, as well as the inhabitants of a string of villages from Kairouan to Sfax.⁷⁹

In the late eighth century Qustas, or Constans, the head of the Christian community of Kairouan, was granted permission to build a church.⁸⁰ In the ninth century we are told that the population between Gabes and Tripoli were Christian, and both Sabratha and Tripoli still had bishops in the eighth century. Indeed we hear of a dispute between the Christians and Muslims of ninth-century Tripoli over repair work on a church – work which used stone from a ruined mosque.⁸¹ A Christian church at Fez in Morocco is also attested in the ninth century.⁸² Further evidence for Christianity comes from an edict of around 875 which required all Jews and Christians to wear certain symbols on their clothes and for these same symbols to appear on their houses.⁸³

In the early tenth century the Christians of Tunis are said to have been temporarily locked-up in their church.⁸⁴ Three tenth-century *fatwas* against Christians provide further evidence for their churches, their role in commerce and their continued use of languages other than Arabic.⁸⁵ At Hadrumetum (Sousse) there was a bishopric in the

Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands – 8th to 18th Centuries (Toronto, 1990), pp. 313–51; R. Marston Speight, 'The Place of the Christians in Ninth Century North Africa according to Muslim Sources', *Islamochristiana*, 4 (1978), pp. 47–65; Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*; J. Cuoq, *L'Église d'Afrique du Nord du IIe au XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1984).

⁷⁸ See Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, p. 101 with references.

⁷⁹ See Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, pp. 102–3, and 107–10, and Brett, 'The Arab Conquest', pp. 509–10.

⁸⁰ M. al-Ka'bi (ed.), *Ibrahim ibn Qasim al-Raqiq al-Qayrawani. Ta'rikh Ifriqiyyah wa al-Maghrib* (Tunis, 1968), pp. 184–5, cited in Talbi, 'Le Christianisme', pp. 316–17.

⁸¹ See Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, p. 110, and T. Lewicki, 'Une langue romane oubliée de l'Afrique du Nord: observations d'un arabisant', *Rocznik orientalistyczny*, 17 (1953), pp. 415–80, at p. 421.

⁸² Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, p. 108.

⁸³ B. el-Baccouche and M. el-Aroussi el-Metoui (eds), *'Abd Allah ibn Abi 'Abd Allah al-Maliki. Kitab Riyad al-Nufus*, vol. 1 (Beirut, 1981), p. 476, cited in Talbi, 'Le Christianisme', p. 319.

⁸⁴ Talbi, 'Le Christianisme', p. 321.

⁸⁵ Talbi, 'Le Christianisme', pp. 322–3.

tenth century.⁸⁶ At Tlemcen in Algeria a church was functioning in the tenth century.⁸⁷ At Sharwas in the Jabal Nafusa of Tripolitania, a tenth-century mosque inscription proclaims the 'equality of the divine truths revealed on the one hand to Muhammad and on the other to the Judaic patriarchs and prophets, including Jesus', suggesting a strong connection between Christianity and Islam within the town.⁸⁸

In the eleventh century, al-Qabisi complained that many Muslims were celebrating the Christian festivals of Easter and Christmas.⁸⁹ We also hear of Christian communities in the towns of Bantuyis, Biskra and Tulqa, all beyond the old Roman *limes*, as well as of Christians in Baghay in Numidia.⁹⁰ The same source, al-Bakri, also makes clear that a church at Shiqqa Banariya in Tunisia was in use in the eleventh century.⁹¹ In the twelfth century al-Idrisi wrote that the inhabitants of Gafsa 'spoke the Latin language of Africa',⁹² while in the fourteenth century, Ibn-Khaldun gives an account of the Latin speaking population of the villages of Nafzawa to the south of Byzacena.⁹³ The Arab sources for Christianity in North Africa provide impressive evidence for the continued practice of Christianity and the speaking of Latin for hundreds of years after the Arab conquest. The Arabic sources are not alone in providing such evidence.

There is substantial evidence for Papal involvement in post-conquest North African Christianity, beginning with the remark on his epitaph that Pope Hadrian I secured bishops for North African sees.⁹⁴ A considerable series of papal letters from the ninth to twelfth century also provides evidence for Christianity in North Africa. In the 840s Pope Leo IV stated that the Churches of Carthage and of Africa shared the same calculation of Easter with Rome.⁹⁵ In the 890s Pope Formosus mentions the arrival of envoys from Africa who requested papal assistance on the subject of a schism which had arisen 'between the bishops of the African provinces'.⁹⁶ This is

⁸⁶ Lewicki, 'Une langue romane oubliée', p. 424.

⁸⁷ Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, p. 110.

⁸⁸ Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, pp. 105, 205–6 and Fig. 10.

⁸⁹ See H. R. Idris, 'Fêtes chrétiennes célébrées en Ifriqiya à l'époque ziride', *Revue africaine*, 98 (1954), pp. 261–76.

⁹⁰ M. Slane (ed. and tr.), *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale* (Algiers, 1913), pp. 51–2, 72, 110–11, 147–8.

⁹¹ Slane, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale*, pp. 33–4, 74.

⁹² Al-Idrisi, *Opus Geographicum*, E. Cerulli, F. Gabrieli, G. Della Vida, L. Petech and G. Tucci (eds), (Naples and Rome, 1970–84), vol. 3, p. 278. The African section of Idrisi's *Geography* is translated into French in R. Dozy and M. J. De Goeje (ed. and tr.), *Description de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne par Edrisi* (Leiden, 1866).

⁹³ M. Slane (ed. and tr.), *Ibn Khaldun. Histoire des Berbères*, (Algiers, 1852), vol. 1, p. 231 and vol. 3, p. 156.

⁹⁴ See 'Silverius', in E. Dümmler (ed.), MGH, *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, I (Berlin, 1881), p. 114, lines 43–8.

⁹⁵ Leo IV, *Ep.*, 8, *Ad episcopos Britanniae*, in J.-P. Migne (ed.), PL, 115 (Paris, 1881), col. 668. This and the other papal letters are all discussed in Talbi, 'La Christianisme', pp. 318–26.

⁹⁶ Formosus, in Flodoard of Rheims, *Historiae Remensis ecclesiae libri quatuor*, in J.-P. Migne (ed.), PL, 135 (Paris, 1879), IV.2 at col. 267.

indeed suggestive that at least some of the ecclesiastical provinces of Africa still existed at the end of the ninth century. Between 974 and 983 Pope Benedict VII received a letter from the Christians of Carthage.⁹⁷ This letter bemoaned the poverty of Carthage and stated that 'the city was reduced to nothing'. As a tonic for these ills they requested that one of their priests be consecrated bishop by the Pope. Between 1049 and 1054 Pope Leo IX wrote two letters to Africa.⁹⁸ The first was addressed to Thomas, Bishop of Carthage and reaffirmed that, contrary to the pretensions of the Bishop of Gummi, Carthage remained the most illustrious metropolitan of 'all of Africa'. Leo IX's second letter was to bishops Peter and John, associated with Tlemcen and Gafsa.

The optimism engendered by the fact that we know three bishops by name from mid-eleventh century Africa must be tempered by the fact that Leo's first letter mentions that only five bishops existed in all of Africa. Pope Gregory VII wrote five letters to Africa between 1073 and 1076. Three of these were to Bishop Cyriacus of Carthage and two were to the town of Bougie. While the existence of these five letters might seem like splendid evidence for a vibrant Christianity in the late-eleventh century, the content of the letters tells another story. The correspondence was initiated by Cyriacus of Carthage, who had written to Pope Gregory with a problem. He wanted to ordain a bishop in the town of Bougie, but since he was the only bishop in Africa, the three bishops required for canonical ordination were simply not available. Cyriacus wanted to know what could be done. Gregory's remedy was to have the candidate, one Servandus, come to Rome for his ordination. Christianity was continuing but on a reduced scale.⁹⁹ These are the last papal letters to Africa, but as late as 1192 there is a further mention of an archbishopric of Carthage.¹⁰⁰ By this stage, however, it is uncertain if the see was actually filled.

In the ninth century, Florus of Lyon wrote two poems on relics of Saint Cyprian which had been brought from Carthage to Gaul by emissaries of Charlemagne.¹⁰¹ It is unclear to what extent this should be taken as evidence for the continuing veneration of Cyprian at Carthage, but support for such an argument comes from an unlikely source.¹⁰² Some time between 868 and the beginning of the tenth century, an unknown author composed the 'The Acts of the Saints of Redon', this Redon

⁹⁷ *Epistola ad Hugonem et Robertum reges*, in J.-P. Migne (ed.), PL, 139 (Paris, 1880), esp. cols. 342–3.

⁹⁸ See Talbi, 'Le Christianisme', pp. 324–5 and Cuoq, *L'Église d'Afrique du Nord*, pp. 185–6.

⁹⁹ See the full discussion in C. Courtois, 'Grégoire VII et l'Afrique du Nord: Remarques sur les communautés chrétiennes d'Afrique du Nord au XI^e siècle', *Revue Historique*, 195 (1945), pp. 97–122 and 193–226.

¹⁰⁰ See L. de Mas Latrie (ed.), *Traité de paix et de commerce* (Paris, 1866), vol. 1, p. 69.

¹⁰¹ Flori Lugdunensis, *Carmina*, 13, 14, in E. Dümmler (ed.), MGH, *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini II* (Berlin, 1884), pp. 544–6.

¹⁰² Also see C. Courtois, 'Reliques carthaginoises et légende carolingienne', *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 129 (1945), pp. 57–83.

being a monastery in south-eastern Brittany founded in 832.¹⁰³ The text tells the story of Frotmund, who, after killing his uncle, was sentenced to travel to 'the holy places' bound tightly in chains. After spending some time in Rome in the 850s Frotmund and his companions travelled to Jerusalem. After this the men went to Egypt, and after almost two years:

moving on from there, they turned their steps to Africa to visit the tomb of St Cyprian, archbishop and martyr of Christ, who lies at rest near the sea at the second milestone from the city of Carthage, where many great works and many miracles are very often revealed by the Lord. After four years Frotmund and his two brothers returned once again to Rome...¹⁰⁴

To my knowledge this ninth-century pilgrimage to the shrine of Cyprian at Carthage has never been discussed by those interested in African Christianity. If the story is to be trusted, and I see no reason not to do so, we have evidence that the church and cult of Cyprian continued to operate in Carthage in the 850s or early 860s. In this context it is interesting to note that an argument has recently been made for seeing a ninth-century mosque as being built on the site of Cyprian's church at Carthage.¹⁰⁵ It is at least possible that this evidence for ninth-century building actually points to repair and refurbishment to the church of Cyprian and that this work was done in the local Arab style of architecture.

Another piece of evidence comes from a letter of 813 from Gregory the Patrician of Sicily to Charlemagne. In this letter Gregory recounts how a Christian friend of his in Africa had written a letter to him with information about the sinking of 100 Arab ships off Sardinia.¹⁰⁶ The final piece of hitherto overlooked evidence comes from the pen of the ninth-century Christian writer Eulogius of Cordoba. In his narrative of the Cordoba martyr movement of the 850s, Eulogius includes the story of the monk George from Jerusalem. George had been sent by his abbot to North Africa to collect donations from daughter monasteries. While in North Africa, George was horrified by the persecution of Christians that he witnessed, but upon hearing that similar persecutions were taking place in Spain, he travelled to Cordoba where he was soon volunteering for martyrdom with the best of them.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium*, C. Brett (ed. and tr.), *The Monks of Redon. Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium and Vita Conuuoionis* (Woodbridge, 1989).

¹⁰⁴ *Gesta Sanctorum Rotonensium*, III.8: ... ac exinde profecti direxerunt gressum ad Africam uisitare sepulchrum sancti Cypriani archiepiscopi et martyris Christi, qui secundo miliario ab urbe Carthaginensi requiescit iuxta mare, ubi multa miracula a Domino saepius ostenduntur. Post autem quatuor annos iterum Frotmundus cum duobus fratribus suis Romam reuersi...

¹⁰⁵ See D. Whitehouse, 'An early mosque at Carthage?', *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale*, 43 (1983), pp. 161–5.

¹⁰⁶ See Leo III, *Ep.*, 7, K. Hampe (ed.), *MGH, Epistolarum*, 5, *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, 3 (Berlin, 1899), pp. 97–9, with a partial translation in P. D. King, *Charlemagne. Translated Sources* (Kendal, 1987), pp. 329–30.

¹⁰⁷ Eulogius, *Memoriale sanctorum*, J. Gil (ed.), *Corpus Scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, 2 (Madrid, 1973), 2.10.

Christian monasteries in North Africa linked to like-minded monasteries in the East; communication between Christians in Africa and Spain – this sounds more like our image of the seventh century than of the 850s; yet the 850s it is.

Material evidence for Christianity in North Africa in the tenth and eleventh centuries is also extant. Most notably this comes in the form of Christian epitaphs from Kairouan, and from En Ngila in Tripolitania. The three inscriptions from Kairouan are dated to 1007, 1019 and 1046, by both *anno domini* and indictions. The use of *anno domini* clearly indicates the importation of this system from Europe, where it had only become ‘popular’ since the eighth or ninth centuries. The examples from 1007 and 1046 are also dated by the *Hegira* – described as *annorum infidelium*. Two of the inscriptions tell us something of the ecclesiastical organization of eleventh-century Kairouan in that one commemorates Firmo the *lector* and the other a son of Petrus the *senior*. Examples of orthography designed to represent the sounds of spoken Latin abound. There are examples of B for V in *bocem* for *vocem*, *bita* for *vita* and *requiebit* for *requievit*, *bixit* for *vixit*, *migrabit* for *migravit*, as well as *cou[arta]* for *quarta* and *millensimo* for *millesimus*.¹⁰⁸ Thus from Kairouan there is evidence for spoken and written Latin, the public erection of Christian monuments, ecclesiastics, the continued use of indictions, and the importation of a new Christian system of dating from Europe. This was the foremost city of Muslim North Africa, the capital of numerous dynasties and an important centre for Koranic studies.

From En Ngila there are 11 Christian epitaphs dated between 945 AD and 1021. Evidence for spoken Latin again abounds – we have the loss of initial H in *oc* for *hoc*, the change from B to V with *binxit*, and the softening of consonants such as D and G in *quarientesimo* for *quadrigentesimo*. All these examples come from just one of the inscriptions. The other inscriptions provide similar examples in similar numbers. Unlike at Kairouan there are no certain examples of ecclesiastical figures. There is, however, the epitaph from 1017 of Petrus, *kl[arissimus] iudex*. The ascription of the *clarissime*, a Roman senatorial grade, to Petrus is as remarkable as it is inscrutable. We have no way of knowing quite what was understood by this title in early eleventh-century Libya. The title of *iudex* might suggest that Petrus held some sort of religious as well as social power over this community. An epitaph from 945 shows the celebration of Christmas, while quotations from *Lamentations*, *Ezekiel* and the letter of James, on some of the other stones reveal knowledge of various Biblical texts. The inscriptions are dated by a combination of indictions and years *ab origine mundi*. Following a Byzantine usage the year 1 used seems to be equivalent to our 5508 BC. All this comes from a community of Christians in tenth- and eleventh-century Libya.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ See A. Mahjoubi, ‘Nouveau témoignage épigraphique sur la communauté chrétienne de Kairouan au XI^e siècle’, *Africa*, 1 (1966), pp. 85–103.

¹⁰⁹ See R. Bartoccini and D. Mazzoleni, ‘Le iscrizioni del cimitero di En Ngila’, *Rivista di archeologia Cristiana*, 53 (1977), pp. 57–197.

The evidence for the continued survival of Christianity in North Africa is compelling.¹¹⁰ It is a fitting irony that while Christian scholars debate whether the Romans, Berbers, Vandals or Byzantines were to blame for the end of Christianity, for Arabists the debate is whether the end of African Christianity should be ascribed to the Almohads or not. For those familiar with the later sources an end of African Christianity in the seventh or eighth century is simply not considered.

It is clear, however, that Christians in North Africa were not getting it all their own way. *Fatwas* were issued against them, they were required to wear certain clothes, there were attempts to compel them to speak Arabic, and a massive diminution in the numbers of bishops – as well as the persecutions that shocked George on his arrival. Indeed on 13 July 1159 a decree was issued calling for the conversion or death of the Christian population of Tunis. It seems more likely, therefore, that it was these sorts of measures, combined with the realization that socio-economic advancement could be achieved most easily through acceptance of Islam, which created the circumstances whereby Christianity dwindled and died in eleventh- and twelfth-century North Africa.¹¹¹

One obvious rejoinder to all the above is that ‘if Christianity continued for so long, why do we have a problem identifying later churches and why do we have a gap of some 300 years between the Christian epitaphs of Byzantine and Islamic Africa?’ This is a strong point, but I also think it is a point that derives its strength from a circular argument. I would suggest that some archaeologists have been overly influenced by the historical model of the ‘End of African Christianity’ in their assessment of the dating of final phases of churches. It seems likely that in the absence of good coin evidence or a pottery sequence, historical assumptions will have played a role in archaeological dating. It is to be hoped that reconsideration of archaeological evidence, without the blinkers provided by unwarranted historical assumption, may provide scholars with churches that did indeed continue in operation beyond the mid-seventh century. Literary sources certainly indicate that churches did exist; the challenge is to find them.

The dating of epitaphs, I would suggest, has been similarly affected. It is a remarkable fact that of the 2416 Christian inscriptions from Carthage published by Lilliane Ennabli, not one is dated by her to after 650 AD. For Ennabli this is the *terminus ante quem* of the last of her Byzantine phases.¹¹² The unspoken assumption behind this dating is that with the end of Byzantine control of North Africa comes the end of Christianity and the end of Christian epitaphs. If it is considered that Christianity did not come to an end in 650, then this dating will simply have to be rethought, and not just at Carthage. The relatively recent editions of inscriptions from the towns of Mactar, Haidra and Sbeitla all work on a similar

¹¹⁰ For some further slight evidence see W. Madelung and P. E. Walker (ed. and tr.), *The Advent of the Fatimids. A contemporary Shi'i witness. An edition and English translation of Ibn al-Hatham's Kitab al-Munazarat* (London, 2000), pp. 133, 140.

¹¹¹ Talbi, ‘Le Christianisme’, pp. 328–46.

¹¹² See the discussion of dating in *ICK I*, *ICK II*, and *ICK III*.

assumption: nothing post-dates 650. The problem is trying to ascertain which inscriptions might belong to the eighth century or later. Certainly none have dating clauses that explicitly indicate such a date. Indeed one argument for the orthodox dating might come from the Byzantine use of indictional dating. For epitaphs this is often seen as a chronological indicator of the Byzantine period.¹¹³ Such an argument is far from compelling.¹¹⁴ Indeed on the earliest Islamic coinage from Carthage, not only are the inscriptions in Latin, but they also use indictional dates.¹¹⁵ It should be remembered that the Christians of Kairouan and En Ngila also used indictions. If indictional dating continued into the Islamic period, it may well become possible to push the range of epitaphs from Carthage and other towns into the eighth century, and possibly even later. This is important work for the future.

CONCLUSIONS

A recently published *History of the Church in Africa* ended its chapter on 'The Earliest Christianity' with the question 'Whom to Blame?'¹¹⁶ Such a question and such an attitude is indicative of much of the work done on Christianity in Roman, Vandal and Byzantine Africa. At one stroke the observation that Christianity remained a vibrant, internationally connected and well-documented religion in North Africa until the eleventh century removes the need to ask this question. Quite simply we no longer need to assume there was a 'problem'. Donatist Berbers, Arian Vandals, Greeks, Pagans, country-dwellers, Romanized Catholics and Augustine himself can all sleep easy. What so many have seen as the great challenge of late antique African history simply does not exist. Christianity did have an 'end-game' in Africa but it was one played out later than usually thought. No causal relationship exists between the events of 400–700 and the suffocation of African Christianity under the Almohads. We no longer need to seek out similarities in the mindset of Berber and Arab; we no longer need to alienate the Romanized from the non-Romanized or the Greek from the Latin; we no longer need to look down our noses at the Christian Berbers and assert that they were unable to understand the theological debates of the seventh century.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ See J. Durliat, 'La lettre L dans les inscriptions byzantines d'Afrique', *Byzantion*, 49 (1979), pp. 156–74; *Les dédicaces d'ouvrages de défense dans l'Afrique byzantine* (Paris, 1981); 'Épigraphie et société. Problèmes de méthode', in G. Cavallo and C. Mango (eds), *Epigrafia medievale Greca e Latina. Ideologia e funzione* (Spoleto, 1995), pp. 169–96, at pp. 170–177; E. Fossile, 'La indizioni nell'epigrafia Cristiana', *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana*, 76 (2000), pp. 589–99.

¹¹⁴ See N. Duval, 'Les systèmes de datation dans l'Est de l'Afrique du Nord `la fin de l'Antiquité et à l'époque byzantine', *Ktema*, 18 (1993), pp. 189–211, and Handley, *Death, Society and Culture*, pp. 126–9.

¹¹⁵ M. L. Bates, 'Roman and Early Muslim Coinage in North Africa', in M. Horton and T. Wiedemann (eds), *North Africa from Antiquity to Islam* (Bristol, 1995), pp. 12–15.

¹¹⁶ B. Sundkler and C. Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 29–30.

¹¹⁷ See for example Speel, 'The Disappearance', p. 384.

The heresies, schisms, paganisms, debates, persecutions and vitality of African religion in the Roman, Vandal and Byzantine periods can now be judged on their own terms. They no longer have to bear the massive explanatory weight we are so used to asking them to carry. Looking backwards from a flawed image of Islamic North Africa to our own period has caused problems. The work of Talbi and Savage provides a different view; one with new questions, new opportunities and far, far, fewer certainties.

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